

# KNIGHTS OF ARABY

*A STORY OF THE YAMAN IN  
THE FIFTH ISLAMIC CENTURY*

BY

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**“Henceforth the vengeance of blood practised in the days of the Ignorance (*i.e.* heathendom) is forbidden, and every feud of blood abolished, beginning with the murder of my cousin Rabîa son of Hârith son of Abdul Mutallib.”**

**—SAYING OF MUHAMMAD.**

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## FOREWORD

AT the time when the persons of the following story lived and battled in Arabia, England was in the first confusion of the Norman conquest. The period from 1066 to 1120 A.D. is approximately the duration of the warlike feud which I have made the subject of this book. The chief events and characters are taken from an old Arabic history of Al Yaman. That history I have compared with others, which give a slightly different version of the same occurrences, appropriating all that I required to make a solid frame for my imaginative fabric. This is an attempt to quicken those dry bones of memory, and reinvest them with some comeliness of flesh and blood. Even if unsuccessful, it may have the merit of calling the attention of the English reader to the fact that Muslims, all those centuries ago, confronted the same problems which we face to-day; and made short work of some of them.

M. W. P.

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# KNIGHTS OF ARABY

## I

ON a headland but a stone's throw from the town of Dahlak, the fugitives from Zabîd were seated one hot afternoon. A grove of palm trees spread a pleasant shade. Through the tall stems which leaned this way and that was seen the dark blue sea between the islands with sails of barques afloat upon it like white butterflies. Along the sands to westward lay the town, two minarets embellishing its roofs of mud and palm-leaf with here and there a solid white-washed house. All kinds of human noises came from thence.

It was the custom of the studious Prince Jeyyâsh to bring his books and chessboard hither in the afternoons, and since he was the only person of the court who had a purpose and an occupation local to this land of exile, the others followed him like aimless sheep. And so this palm-clad promontory had come to be their usual meeting-place. Here they sang interminable songs and told long rambling stories, or listened to the expositions of the learned Sheykh Rashîd, a former tutor of the princes, now their honoured friend. Also the famous jester, Abu Dad, beloved of King Najâh, was of the company, and he possessed the gift of making laughter out of air. The time passed pleasantly enough in general. But on this day there was no hum of conversation, no laughter and no song. The

members of the circle sat with eyes downcast listening to the angry declamation of a single voice. The speaker was their lord, the young King Saïd. They had been comfortable till he came among them suddenly and accosted Prince Jeyyâsh, renewing, as it seemed, some former quarrel. Jeyyâsh appeared unmoved, but all the others trembled; for his temper, when aroused, was just as formidable as his brother's. None of the hearers knew exactly what the matter was, which made things worse. The king accused Jeyyâsh of rank disloyalty, denounced him as a coward and a traitor, and swore by the tomb of the Prophet that something, known between them, should be done. At last he paused for breath, and then Jeyyâsh said simply:

"Never."

Saïd bounded to his feet. The whole assemblage sprang up likewise, for it seemed that he was going to strike his brother. Men hastened forward to prevent that great calamity. But the impassioned youth had changed his mind. Superb, with folded arms, he stood and looked down at Jeyyâsh, exclaiming:

"What word is this from thee to me? Art thou the king? By Allah, if I give command . . ."

"None will obey."

"Say that again, rebellious dog! I am the king, I say!"

"King or no, thou art a Muslim, and accountable to God for all thy deeds."

"And is it not the cause of God for which I strive—to turn out those who dispossessed us wrongfully?"

"All present are thy helpers in that cause," put in the Sheykh Rashîd.

"Have patience, O my master," said Jeyyâsh a little irritably. "Thou knowest not the matter in dispute between us. The cause of men unjustly exiled may be deemed the cause of God, but the deed which

Saïd proposes as a first step towards our reinstatement is abominable. Say, O my brother ! Shall I tell them what it is ? ”

“ Do so and I will kill thee straightway with these hands of mine ! ”

Saïd gnashed his teeth and strode away into the palm-grove. But in a minute he was back among them, crying :

“ I care not though all know it. I myself will tell them ; ” and he sat down in the circle close to Abu Dad.

“ That is well, my brother,” said Jeyyâsh pacifically. “ Behold me quite content that they should judge between us.” And he resumed the game of chess with Sheykh Rashîd which had been interrupted by the coming of the king. The others present turned their gaze on Saïd, who sat a moment with his eyes closed, summoning his force of eloquence. His features, clearly cut and regular, composed a face of striking beauty, black yet with a warmth beneath the skin which the court poets in his childhood likened to the glow of burning cities on the dome of night—an eager face, transparent to its lord’s emotions from love and tenderness to cruel rage.

Suddenly he opened his eyes and all the beauty of the face was broken as a glass is shattered by a stone. He squinted in a way which frightened strangers, though those with whom he lived had ceased to notice it ; nay, some there were who, loving him, were ready to maintain that in his squint there was a certain charm. Then he began to speak. The words came in a flood of eloquence. One by one his listeners forsook the posture of respect for one more comfortable, giving play to the emotions which his words aroused. He told the story of his father’s life and death, of the battle of Zabîd, the flight to Dahlak, and the suicide of King Muarik, till his hearers moaned aloud in their emotion.

"We should have been destitute," he said, "had not Jeyyâsh, my brother, returned disguised to the city and recovered certain moneys which had been deposited with one of our adherents. Is not that so?"

"Wallahi!" said a man, "and for that reason, O my lord, it is sad for us to see thee angry with thy noble brother."

"Wait till thou knowest all, then judge!" said Saïd warmly. "Who is the man who brought upon us all this evil, who has usurped our honour in the Yaman, and reduced our sovereign city to a mere dependency?"

"His name," replied Abu Dad, throwing a stone with great deliberation but no aim discernible, "is Ali son of Dog, son of Pig, son of Atheist, the champion of the false Khalîfah, base descendant of the Jew of Kerbelah."

"Leave out all that," said Jeyyâsh irritably, looking up from the chessboard for a moment. "His name is Ali es-Suleyhi, lord of Sanaa."

The prince's face was like his brother's, but of rougher moulding, and distinguished by unusual breadth between the eyes.

"Is it not right that we should seek revenge upon that miscreant?"

"It is right, by Allah!"

"Is there anything on earth more sacred for us than this duty?"

"There is not."

"You all know that a man of good position in Zabîd, the Sheykh Salâmah, is here in Dahlak, having made the journey for no other purpose than to bring us tidings. He tells us how the people loathe the yoke of our supplanter, how they sigh for our return. He says that, had we but an army, we could take Tehâmah without fighting, since the walled cities are but weakly garrisoned. We possess no army. We

must have an army at all costs. Our need is instant. We see an army ready to our hand, and take it ; who can blame us for so doing ? This is no time for scruples or misgivings."

"Away with forethought !" chuckled Abu Dad, throwing another stone down toward the sea.

"Now listen to my brother, every one of you !" Jeyyâsh commanded, still with gaze intent upon the chessboard over which his right hand hovered.

"Aye, listen," answered Saïd with defiance. "Now, my plan is this. The lord of Dahlak has an army of four thousand men. He moves with a small retinue ; we have free access to his presence. We choose our time and fall upon him suddenly when he is seated with his family ; we slay them all and take the kingdom. The army will not be displeased, for our house is famed for liberality ; and the faithful will not notice any change. Thus at one blow we gain a kingdom and much wealth, an army and a fleet with which we sail across that water to Hodeydah." He pointed through the palm-trunks to the open sea. "The thing is easy, and it must be done. What say you ?"

There was a moment of dead silence. Then an old man sighed : "Alas, my lord, it is a crime unthinkable !"

"The thing is easy," quoth the Sheykh Rashîd, "only because the lord of Dahlak, our protector and our host, has no suspicion of a foul design in us."

"Pshaw ! What is he !" cried Saïd vehemently. "God knows I have no hatred of the man himself. But I must have the power which he possesses. Sweep him away ; the world will not be darkened."

"And ever after," said the Sheykh Rashîd in a low, even tone, "mankind will call my noble lord a traitor and an ingrate, a breaker of the law of hospitality, one worse than Ali es-Suleyhi who has at least the honour of the heathen Arabs. Remember, O my pupil, that

thou art a Muslim. Such thoughts are not for thee. Observe the limits ! ”

“ Dost hear the judgment, O my brother ? ” said Jeyyâsh.

Saïd started up as if he had been stung. With teeth and hands clenched he looked round upon the faces. Then, with a cry, “ Will all men always fail me ? ” he girded up his loins and ran towards the town. Several of the exiles rose as if to follow, but Jeyyâsh restrained them, saying :

“ Let my brother be ! He goes now to my sister, who knows how to soothe him. He is at heart an earnest Muslim and the best of men ; but his energy of mind is such that, in this season of enforced inaction, it distracts his brain.”

“ With thy permission I will join him, notwithstanding,” grumbled Abu Dad. “ Far be it from a servant like myself to venture to reprove my lord Jeyyâsh and others present, yet methinks that you have all dealt wrongly with my lord the king. Has he not always had these visions which he calls his plans ? When he was a child I well remember how he would relate them, asking me to be his right hand in their execution. His dreams were sometimes wise and sometimes foolish ; and the way, when they were foolish, was to feign approval, and then to lead him gently to discern their folly. If we dealt so with a child, how much more ought we to be tender of a man full grown and passionate, in whom is all our hope ? Instead of that you have rebuked him publicly, which to a youth so proud and sensitive is like an axe-blow.”

“ Thou speakest sense, O jester,” said the Sheykh Rashîd.

“ Go to him if thou wilt,” Jeyyâsh conceded. “ He loves thee, and will not repel thee as he would the rest of us. And, if thou canst, remove him from the Sheykh

Salâmah. By Allah, in my thoughts all this unhappiness is owing to that man's bad influence. What say you ? ”

Some said one thing, some another ; but the most part differed from the prince's judgment, considering the Sheykh Salâmah a good man enough. Had he not proved his loyalty and goodness by coming from Zabîd to pay his duty to the princes ? The Sheykh Rashîd, however, murmured :

“ I seek refuge in Allah from a man who loves political disturbance, yet is not a fighter.” And Jeyyâsh, who heard him, nodded with a smile of tightened lips.

By that time Abu Dad, the jester—who was called by his inferiors the Sheykh Muhammad—was on the sea-sand labouring towards the town—a fat man amply robed, beneath a goodly turban. For lack of a reserve of breath his pace was slow. Arriving at last at the house of the princess, Saïd's sister, who had married a relation of the lord of Dahlak, he was informed that the Squinter had that minute left it ; the slaves had seen him go in the direction of the harbour, walking hurriedly. The jester plodded in the same direction. Beside the harbour was a khan for travellers, and there in a corner of the mud enclosure, he found the king in conversation with the Sheykh Salâmah. He sighed as he remembered the suspicions of Jeyyâsh.

“ Avaunt, O Abu Dad, since thou despisest me,” was Saïd's greeting.

“ My lord is pleased to jest. He knows, none better, that he is the king. We all look up to him, and for that reason would preserve his honour bright as is the sun at noon.”

“ Well, Allah knows that I am now dishonoured in your sight—ashamed—my face is blackened. Never, never can I look upon Jeyyâsh again—my younger brother, yet my master in all goodness. I sail at dawn



to-morrow with the Sheykh Salâmah. That is quite settled, is it not, O Sheykh ? ”

“ It is as your Highness wills. I am your servant,” said the Sheykh Salâmah, spreading out his hands and smiling widely—a sleek, close-bearded man with keen black eyes, whose perfect manners made the king appear an eager boy. “ I go now to retain a passage for your Highness and your servant in the ship.”

“ Allah increase thy wealth,” said Saïd warmly. “ I count thee as my only friend in all the world.”

Saïd took the arm of Abu Dad and led him out on to the sandy shore, now growing ruddy in the evening light. The jester, who had known and loved him from a babe, strove to detach him from the thought of leaving Dahlak. But Saïd replied that go he must and would, since he, the rightful king of Yaman, and upholder of the banner of the Caliphate, had been rebuked and flouted like the last of malefactors, there on that palm-clad headland which was now between them and the setting sun. And rightly : there was the humiliation. The scheme which he proposed had been in truth dishonourable. After talking to his favourite sister, he had seen that clearly. How he had ever been in love with it he could not think ; and so on. No, there was nothing for it but to go.

“ But whither ? What to do ? ” asked Abu Dad.

“ Whereelse but to Zabîd and to regain our kingdom ? Had I been in fact a king would they have flouted me ? I have dreamed enough about that kingdom, I now go to seek it. I have dreamed enough of battles, I now go to fight. By this alone can I regain my honour. With Allah’s help I shall succeed. Then, when single-handed I have won the kingdom and avenged my father’s blood, once more I can embrace with joy my dear Jeyyâsh, whom now my soul forbids me but to look upon. Seek no longer to deter me, for my mind is fixed. I sail to-morrow in a vessel bound for Aden.”

“ And I go with thee ! ” exclaimed Abu Dad without reflection, moved by his love and sorrow for the lad.

Saïd clapped his hands and shouted praise to Allah. He then confessed that he had felt much dread of travelling alone, for the Sheykh Salâmah could not bear him company beyond the port of Aden for fear of Ali es-Suleyhi ; and his (Saïd’s) servant was a stupid lad from the interior of Africa, who was like to be a burden rather than a help.

“ But now, with thee, O ancient reprobate,” he cried exultant, “ my dread is turned to glad anticipation. It makes one laugh only to look at thee, stuffed as thou art with jokes and merry fancies. No, stop ! ” —as Abu Dad was making off—“ I will not have thee go and tell the others. Our going is a secret, dost thou hear me ? Only my sister knows, and she is faithful. No, by the Lord, I will not trust thee out of sight. Thou walkest here with me until night darkens, and then we go on board the ship moored yonder.”

The jester, with an inward groan, resigned himself. It was not the first time that, upon unreasoned impulse, he had exchanged a quiet life for one of danger and discomfort. But use had not inured him in the least. There was a woman in a little house outside the town to whom he would have liked to say good-bye. He would have liked to kiss the hand of Prince Jeyyâsh, and save him from the anguish of uncertainty which he was sure to feel on Saïd’s disappearance. Instead, he was obliged to walk the sea-shore at his tyrant’s pace, watching the sunset die on land and sea. The Squinter was a genial friend to those who served his pleasure, but opposition roused the lion in him. He had been so from a child. The jester felt unhappy, elderly, and much afraid. He cursed the fate which always dragged him back into the life he most abhorred, the life of action.

## II

So long as the breeze held favourable the ship ploughed the dark blue water steadily beneath its one white sail, always in sight of land. The prow ran upwards narrowing to a point ; so that, to the prince and Abu Dad, who sat aft beneath an awning in the place reserved for people of consideration, it seemed nearly upright against sea and sky. The wonder was that all the humble passengers encamped upon it appeared at ease and did not slither down into the waist. When the breeze failed altogether or blew contrary the skipper dropped his anchor in the lee of some serrated headland, or coral reef denoted by a line of foam. Twice at evening parties went ashore to bring fresh water. The voyage lasted for five days, the vessel gliding down the coast of Africa and then across the straits of Bâb-el-Mandab. There was on board a poet who beguiled the time with fine improvisations and a minstrel of the humbler sort who twanged a lute. The sailors chanted at their work, the sea-birds screamed, and in the interval between the sunset and the sleep-time prayers, some devotees intoned the praise of Allah and His Prophet in loud nasal strains.

Amid the group of people of importance, including Saïd and Abu Dad and their confederate the Sheykh Salâmah, were several doctors of religion journeying to the Arabian universities. These slept in the heat of the day ; but in the evenings and the early mornings they amused themselves for hours together with

discussion of nice points of doctrine or religious law. The Sheykh Salâmah, who was learned and a subtle casuist, joined in their arguments, and seemed to take a quiet pleasure in confusing them ; while Saïd, with face half-muffled in his head-shawl, leaned on the bulwarks near at hand and watched them listlessly. Abu Dad, after the first few hours of sorrow for his fate and repentance of his rash impetuosity, became the life and soul of the ship's company. He won the approbation of the learned doctors by his reverence ; he vied with the poet in inventing clever rhymes about the sea, the sky, the heat, their fellow-travellers—anything that came to mind. He charmed the humble singer on the poop by his applause and by his readiness to take the lute and sing in turn. He had a voice renowned throughout Arabia. All spoke his praise till Saïd, seeing him observed of all, began to fear that their disguise was penetrable. Some one on board was sure to guess at his identity and so arrive at that of his companion. He confided his misgiving to the Sheykh Salâmah, who made light of it with the remark that men were mostly unobservant of what gave them pleasure. It was only where suspicion or hostility had been aroused that minds grew keen to probe beneath the surface. And everybody, from the turbaned skipper and the jurists down to the slaves and little children, were delighted with the antics of the portly jester.

Saïd had recovered from his self-abasement. It was not the nature of his mind to brood upon past failure, but always to strain forward after some new project. He kept aloof from all the various groups, conversing only with his servant Tâhir, with the Sheykh Salâmah and old Abu Dad. To them his talk was confident and eager. He already saw himself the King of Yaman.

“ When we are certain of success I shall invite

Jeyyâsh to come and join us. He, my dearest brother, with every one who has adhered to me in exile, shall share my triumph and prosperity," he told them.

"If God wills," whispered Abu Dad as a reminder to himself and to his master that men's prospects are dependent on a higher Power. But Saïd's eloquence was such when he forecast the future, his ambition had so much the colour of religious zeal, that the jester was in fact entranced and carried with him, although his conscience told him to restrain the lad. The prince possessed the glamour of the story-tellers who, by torchlight, in some nook of the bazaars, maintain the common people spellbound, without thought of sleep. This gift it was which made the squint-eyed son of king Najâh more followed than Jeyyâsh, his serious brother.

The Sheykh Salâmah did not fall beneath the spell. He argued with the royal dreamer, as the jester also would have done had he obeyed his conscience; but in a way that frightened Abu Dad.

"Lay aside these idle fancies, O my lord!" he would exclaim with a slight sneer. "The kingdom will not be regained so easily. After ten years of secret working, patient scheming, it may be, thou wilt see thy way to it. In the case of some rough-bred adventurer it might be otherwise. He would be relentless in ambition, he would kill. But thou, a man of honour and of lofty principles, say, wouldst thou kill a man who might perchance betray thee, merely to make it certain that he should not do so? Wouldst thou kill all those who chance to recognize thee? . . . No, by the Prophet, no, thou art too gentle-hearted. Yet such deeds must be done by him who would succeed. By Allah, I repent me that I let thee start on such an errand. My sin is great. I ask forgiveness of the Lord."

"Now, by my life, thou errest! I would kill

without compunction any man who stood between me and my righteous goal," protested Saïd earnestly, and went on to enumerate the crimes he would commit if necessary.

"By the tomb of my father, by the Lord of Mercy, it is true," he cried when the smooth Sheykh still looked incredulous.

"Better not attempt it," was the sneering answer. "Forgo the undertaking and return to Dahlak."

"No, that I swear I will not," answered Saïd hotly.

Abu Dad was filled with horror by such talk. In private he remonstrated with Sheykh Salâmah, saying :

"Your honour, it is known, speaks only for my lord's reproof; but, with permission be it spoken, that is not the way to calm his mind, but rather to increase its rage and make him reckless."

The Sheykh replied : "Results are not with us. I do my duty when I warn our lord of dangers. Thou doest wrong, in my opinion, to applaud his dreams."

"God knows, perhaps I do. Our Lord forgive me," muttered Abu Dad. "And yet I fear that thou wilt goad him to commit some crime."

But nothing he could find to say had power to influence the Sheykh Salâmah, who, conscious of superior learning, only smiled.

One night the talk among the learned doctors, set in a circle round a lantern on the deck, ran upon bloodshed and the guilt belonging to it.

One said : "To kill is lawful only in retaliation. 'God loves not the aggressors.'"

The Sheykh Salâmah answered : "Nay, to kill the enemies of God wherever found is just and lawful," and he quoted Scripture.

"Those texts refer to open warfare," said an aged man, "and we are speaking now of private spite. Ye know the saying of the Prophet (may God bless and

save him) : ' Vengeance for blood is forbidden from henceforward, and the feud of blood practised in the days of the Ignorance is abolished.' All men know that vengeance for blood is unlawful, yet look at all the country of the Arabs. The chiefs both great and small are all at feud. It is among the learned and the common people that the precepts of our faith have taken root and flourished. I say, those great ones, self-exalted, and their doings, are of small importance. They are lauded only by their slaves and their paid flatterers. The people as a whole endure them, while the learned hold them in contempt."

" Is it possible for one in power to be a proper Muslim ? " questioned one.

" Yes, verily ; there have been many such, the praise to Allah : humble before Allah, modest towards mankind, seeking the best advice and acting on it, unaggressive. We need not go back to the great example. Such an one was Huseyn ibn Salâmah there in Yaman, the same who built the mosques and wells along the road to Mecca—he that was a slave to the Bani Ziyâd and rose to be Wazîr and regent."

" Aye, by the sublime Corân, thou speakest truth, my father. The best of them, it seems to me, have all been slaves."

" What of Najâh, the King of Yaman only yesterday ? " asked Saïd eagerly.

" He, O my son, was a well-meaning man, no doubt, but yet a fighter and the servant of ambition. He was besides revengeful. Did he not immure his patron while yet living, together with the dead Naffs whom he had slain in battle ? "

" By thy permission, O my uncle, that was just retaliation. Marjân and Naffs had previously immured alive their infant sovereign and the princess regent. Najâh was a good ruler."

" Not a bad one," said a man who had not spoken

until now, a merchant with a puffy face and little beady eyes as black as coal, remarkable for his officiousness to all and sundry. He had watched Saïd from the moment when he joined the argument. The prince's face was quite unmuffled now, the squint was evident. Abu Dad clenched his teeth and hands and glanced in anguish at the Sheykh Salâmah, who merely shrugged his shoulders up, as who should say, "I wash my hands of him ! "

"Not a bad one," said the merchant, staring straight at Saïd ; "and yet not better than the man who governs in his place. Except that Zabîd is now no more the capital, and that the Obeydite Khalîfah is now mentioned in the Friday sermon in the mosques, the quiet folk have nothing to complain of ; indeed, are unaware of any change."

"I hear another story," answered Saïd with vehemence. "They tell me that the people groan beneath the yoke of the usurper, and pray to Allah hourly for release."

The other shrugged : "Well, go and see ! I doubt if thou wilt find a hundred men, all told, who hold Najâh in loyal memory. There is a rumour, which the simple deem a prophecy, to the effect that the son of Najâh will some day rule the land. But one who truly loved mankind, as God commands, would use his best endeavours to prevent it. It would mean disaster—war and desolation—to a peaceful country, with all the horrors of a feud of blood."

"Is it not a sacred duty for the son of Najâh to avenge his father, who was treacherously murdered ? "

The oldest of the jurists answered : "No, my son. The Apostle (may God bless and save him) answers thee, saying : 'Vengeance of blood is forbidden, and the feud of blood abolished.' God Most High has said : 'Forgiveness is better for you if ye did but know.' "



"But such high virtue is not possible for all men," one objected.

"It all depends upon the circumstances," said another.

Fearing lest his master might declare himself in further argument, Abu Dad drew him away.

"What is it, O my dear?" asked Saïd irritably.

"Bless the Prophet, O my lord!" the jester murmured sadly. "Say, hast thou not a squint of both thine eyes? And do not all men know that Saïd, the son of Najâh, is so distinguished? In another minute all men present would have recognized thee. As it is, that prying merchant has our secret."

"Fear nothing, O my dear," laughed Saïd carelessly. "They all accept me for the man I seem to be—a quiet student. . . . But say, didst hear what he related of a prophecy to the effect that I should soon return and take the kingdom? 'No more than a hundred men,' he said, 'are loyal.' Well, a hundred will suffice with Allah's help."

His hundred men were there before him in the night. He armed and drilled them, and with their help performed a hundred stratagems, unknown to any save old Abu Dad, who could not for the life of him escape the glamour of the tale. And on the morrow they were still before him, while Abu Dad, catching his eagerness, commanded them, he also, in imagination, and invented incidents. The ship flew fast beneath its huge white wing, cleaving the restless sea, towards Arabia. The heat was crushing. They passed the rocks of Perim early in an afternoon, and before sunset anchored near the coast of Asia. The wind had dropped. Like the first breath of night a light breeze came from off the land. Saïd stood and sniffed it, rigid, like a man entranced.

The merchant who had spoken slightly of King Najâh drew near behind him, saying: "A sweet

odour, is it not? And one, I think, which rouses memories in both my hearers."

Getting no answer, he continued in a wheedling tone:

"You go to Aden? Not to loiter there, I think? In a day or two you will be riding onward towards Zabīd. Hodeydaḥ would have been much nearer for a landing, but that is in the country of the enemy; a watch is kept on all who come and go. I, too, am riding to Zabīd from Aden. Ride with me! I am a modest man and ask no questions, that is understood; nor do I meddle in high politics. One who dealt in such things might acquire a fortune by simply journeying to Sanaa and whispering a word of warning in the ear of Ali es-Suleyhi, king of kings and sovereign of the Arabs. But I am not that kind of man. I will befriend you."

"What words are these?" asked Saīd angrily.

"Art mad or what? I make naught of thy whispers."

"Be it as thou wilt, O son of Najāḥ. I might, God knows, have been of use to thee," muttered the merchant as he turned away.

"He will divulge our secret. I must see the Sheykh Salāmah and ask him what to do," said Saīd irritably.

The Sheykh was in the circle of the learned. He rose up at a sign from Abu Dad, and came to them. When he had heard Saīd's tale, he frowned in thought a minute. Then he said:

"Hear my advice. To-morrow we reach Aden. Go ashore, O Abu Dad, and find out when the next ship leaves for Dahlak. Take passage in it for our lord and for thyself."

"Never!" said Saīd resolutely.

"All hope is at an end. That merchant is a gossip and a busybody. I know him well by reputation. Within an hour after he lands to-morrow thy secret will be known to all the port."

"The man must die to-night."

"True, if thou wouldst succeed. But killing is a crime. Better return to Dahlak for a while."

"That I have said I will not."

"I have spoken."

The Sheykh Salâmah sauntered back to join the learned circle.

"The man may be quite harmless," reasoned Abu Dad; "wait, O my lord, until I bring thee word of him."

He went to find the merchant. Saïd stood staring at the rugged land till he returned with joyful face, declaring that the man was not ill-natured, though unduly curious. He had spoken of his own trustworthiness and of the danger to the king from men more indiscreet. He wished to curry favour with his Highness and, as it might be, introduce him to Zabîd.

"Leave him to me," said Abu Dad. "By Allah, I will so bedevil him with pranks and stories that, far from plotting any harm to us, his prying self shall move in fear and trembling."

"Perhaps. Still it is dangerous," Saïd muttered thoughtfully.

The master of the ship passed near them, shouting to his men. The wind was once more favourable; and in the darkness he ran slight risk upon that coast where every rock and shoal was known to him.

Hours later, when the passengers were all asleep, and the ship's crew slumbered likewise, all except the helmsman and the man who kept look-out in the high prow, the jester was aroused by some one treading on his leg. He sat up with an oath, to nurse the damaged limb. Two men were carrying to the ship's side a struggling burden from which came grunts and gurgles. It took him half a minute to arrive at the conclusion that the burden must, in nature, be some human being, with a shawl across its mouth. He scrambled to his

feet and made for the assassins, but too late. He heard the sound of panting, a half-smothered cry, and then a splash. The murderers hung on the bulwarks for a moment, gazing at the sea, then turned, and he beheld their faces. He came near to swoon in his dismay; for he stood face to face with Saïd the king and Tâhir. The latter, grinning broadly, murmured: "Finished!" Saïd said: "I feel the same, the praise to Allah, yet I have killed a man. Now I can sleep."

The watchman on the prow called out to know the matter.

"A true believer gone to paradise," was Saïd's answer. "He was sick and, being half asleep, leaned too far forward."

"There is neither power nor might save in Allah the High, the Tremendous. May the fulness of God's mercy be upon him," chanted the watchman on the prow. The chant was echoed by the helmsman at the stern. The jester fell down on the deck and wept and prayed, cursing the Sheykh Salâmah from the bottom of his heart. The ship sped creaking on its course towards the dawn.

### III

ON the summit of a tower, high up upon a mountain side, there lounged a watchman with a flowing shawl bound by a rope of camel's hair about his head. He leaned with elbows on the parapet, his eyes half-closed. Beside him on the roof reposed his bow and a stout leathern quiver, three parts full of arrows. He was looking down over the village of tall fortress houses, girt with a meagre tract of cultivation, to the valley which wound out of sight on either hand. Here and there, upon both slopes, were other villages, each with its watch-tower on a height above. Along the wady ran the road from the seaport of Aden to Ta'izz and other cities in the south of Yaman. The watchman kept his eyes upon that track, for his clan was newly in revolt against the lord of Aden, and all who came from thence might honourably be despoiled. It was the third hour of the day ; the morning chill had been dispersed, and heat and sunlight weighed upon the mountain land.

All at once he opened both his eyes and shaded them with his right hand, standing upright. His ear had caught the sound of distant bells. A caravan was coming from the south. Presently his keen eyes could discern a group of men and camels, moving among the rocks, as small as ants. He seized a horn placed ready to his hand, sounded a blast, and then with his own voice uttered a long, wild yell. These sounds were answered from the village close below, and then

from all the other villages along the valley. They were followed by the warlike shouts of men and ululating joy-cries of the women. Drums were beaten, horns were blown like mad; and soon from every township groups of archers and of mounted spearmen were careering down on to the road.

The caravan, a small one, showed no fight. It consisted of eight riders upon dromedaries, with no more than a score of baggage animals. It stopped at a respectful distance, and sent forward spokesmen, one of whom, a black youth with a squint, seemed, by his clothes, a student of theology, while the other was a well-known guide from Aden, owner of the camels.

"We are peaceful men, no enemies," exclaimed the latter, cringing low before the tribesmen's fierce array. "For the love of Allah, let us go in peace."

"First you must pay our dues," replied a leader of the mountaineers.

"And what may they be?"

"All that you possess! It is a time of war."

"Merciful Allah!" cried the other spokesman of the caravan, who was no other than King Saïd, who from Aden had despatched his servant back to Dahlak charged with a letter to Jeyyâsh his brother. "The loads belong to four poor righteous merchants, our companions, who by your deed will be reduced to penury. They are not of Aden, being natives of Ta'izz; so they have no concern in this your war. And they are Muslims; therefore their lives and property are sacred to you. Are you infidels? Bear witness!"

"There is no god save God, and Muhammad is the messenger of God," answered the tribesmen in a shout. The members of the caravan replied with the same words. "None the less we take your camels and your merchandise by way of compensation for our wrongs which have been great," proclaimed their

leader. Another of them added meaningly : " Oppose us, and your lives will not be safe. ' God loves not the aggressors.' "

The spokesmen then, with gestures of despair, returned towards their colleagues. They conferred together. Saïd, the impetuous, was all for fighting, but the others treated his advice as a bad joke ; and as he gazed on the opponent ranks, by their direction, he also knew that to resist was hopeless.

" Make haste with your decision, or we will not spare you," came a threatening shout, emphasized by a flight of arrows shot at random.

" Well, we are Muslims, we resign our cause to God."

The words meant unconditional surrender. All dismounted. The merchants pressed their faces to the dust ; so did the owner of the camels. Saïd and Abu Dad, together with the poet they had met on shipboard, who, like themselves, was going to Zabîd, stood still with folded arms, hands hidden in their flowing sleeves and faces of profound despondency. The tribesmen swarmed around them.

" Let every son of a dog of you take off his clothes," came the command.

" Resist not, for the love of Allah ! " whispered Abu Dad. " Would God that I had never joined this mad adventure. Speak not to me again. If they should ask concerning me, swear by thy father's grave that I was dumb from birth." Therewith the jester filled his mouth with money and, emitting strange inhuman sounds from time to time, proceeded to strip off his clothes. A bag with money in it hung upon his naked chest. A mountaineer pounced on it eagerly, cutting the string which bound it to his neck. Abu Dad fell on the ground with piteous moans.

" Afflict him not. He is a mute from birth," cried Saïd appealingly.

"Our lord requite him in the other world!" replied the persecutors, touched with pity, and they let him be.

Having seen the men strip naked, and relieved them of all valuables, the mountaineers restored to each of them sufficient clothing to protect him from the sun; and then, expressing kindly wishes for their future comfort both in this world and the next, departed with the spoils which were not great.

The owner of the camels lay and bit the stones, cursing the day that he was born, and asking help of God; then suddenly sprang up and, with hands clenched and eyes ablaze, declared his firm intention not to pause for food or rest till he had roused the Government of Aden to avenge his wrongs. Mother-naked, save for cap and turban, he set off at a run. The dirty shift which had been given back to him by the marauders, flung across his shoulder, streamed out like a scarf. The merchants, after some debate among themselves, agreed to follow his example and return to Aden. They questioned Abu Dad of his intentions. Saïd answered for him:

"We are going forward."

"But you may perish by the way!"

"We are on Allah's mercy."

"Aye, so are we, and yet we are not mad. God's mercy is on those who use their reason. And thou?" they asked the poet.

"To Ta'izz, where I have friends. In Aden I am quite a stranger. I go forward also."

"Well, Allah guard and guide you!" said the merchants kindly as they started off.

Then Abu Dad let fall the money from his mouth. After a lot of spitting he enunciated:

"I swallowed only two dinârs of it."

"God will restore them to thee," said the poet.

"Hide the gold quickly. People are approaching,"



Saïd enjoined. The jester placed the money deftly in his turban.

"I looked, and there was money on the ground :  
I looked again, no money could be found,"

the poet sang in tones of admiration.

Three women bearing trays and pitchers, led by an old man who appeared of rank, drew near, inquiring :

"Where are your companions? There were eight of you, and now but three!"

"They have returned towards Aden. We pursue our journey," answered Saïd with dignity.

"Cut short their lives for going off like that. Behold our faces blackened," said the chieftain. "Do they think us infidels that we should suffer men whom we have robbed in war to go their way without provision for the journey? Here is food enough. Eat, drink, and take for your necessity."

The Sheykh sat down beside them in the shade of rocks. The women squatted near to watch them eat. Other people from the villages strolled down to look. Though Saïd could eat but little, for each mouthful choked him, his two companions made a hearty meal, to the contentment of their robber-hosts, whose satisfaction swelled to rapture when the poet, being full, intoned a poem of some twenty couplets in praise of their great hospitality and tribal honour.

"It grieves me that the others, your companions, went off empty," said the chieftain, "for surely we are left their debtors in this matter of provision. Say, O my children, would it not be seemly to restore to these three servants of the Lord their raiment?"

"Wallahi, yes! It would increase our honour."

The women raised their joy-cries. In the end, the prince, the poet, and old Abu Dad were led up to the nearest fort, no more as enemies. To each was given proper clothing and a staff, a few small coins,

and food enough to last two days. Thus furnished, they set forth again towards evening, escorted for some distance by the tribesmen, who assured them: "Now you have nought to fear. Only recite the tale how you were plundered, and all mankind will pity and befriend you."

So it proved; for when, after walking through a rocky gorge all night, beside a rushing stream, they came at dawn into a wider glen where there were villages, no horns were blown, no war-cries sounded, no angry swarm of men came out against them. They met one going to his work among the fields. At once, on their request, he took them to his house, bidding them rest and take refreshment for the love of God.

"This is the way to travel," said the poet gaily. "That camel which I bought for ten dînârs at Aden was a lure to danger. The poor and the unfortunate are ever safe where Muslims dwell."

"Aye, would to God we had set out like this!" said Saïd.

"All very well for you," groaned Abu Dad, "who are possessed with youth as with a jinni, who know no fatigue. But as for me, my heart is loose within me, my limbs ache, my brain within my forehead is a heavy stone. Would God that I had still my pleasant camel, would God that I had never left those blessed isles, the isles of Dahlak, where life flowed smoothly on without these pains."

"God will reward thee, O my uncle!" chuckled Saïd. "There is no hurry. Say but the word at any time, and we will pause and rest. But for myself I say: Praise be to Allah who has let me taste this air of freedom. Some day, with God's permission, I will make this road so safe that virgins decked with gold and precious gems might saunter from Ta'izz to Aden unmolested."

He did not often speak thus of his hopes, for the

presence of the poet near at hand was a constraint ; but often his lips moved as if he spoke with those invisible, and his black face took on a visionary, rapt expression. Thus they travelled on, marching at dawn and evening, resting through the hours of dreadful heat and at the dead of night, sometimes at a village, sometimes under rocks. The two young men found wild exhilaration in those mountain solitudes ; and even Abu Dad, a half-hour after setting out, when his old legs had shaken off their stiffness and before fatigue reduced him to a state of moans, had moments when he was again the brilliant jester, the pearl of all his time, the joy of kings.

One daybreak they were starting on their way, after sleeping in a cave which opened on a narrow gorge, when suddenly they heard the drone of bells and saw black, moving shapes among the rocks. A camel came distinctly into sight around a monstrous boulder close to them. Another and another followed, each with muffled rider and load projecting widely upon either side. The beasts came swaying onward with a drowsy motion like the rocking of a ship at rest upon a languid sea. At a glance it could be judged from their appearance that the caravan had travelled all the night.

"Peace be upon you !" cried the poet to the foremost rider. "Whence and whither ?"

"From Zabîd the guarded, in the care of Allah, by the way of Ta'izz ; and we proceed to Aden."

"The road is cut for you. The tribes are out between this place and Lahej."

"What sayest thou ?" The leader called a halt. Men gathered round while Saïd and his friends retold the story of their loss.

"Allah will recompense you," said the camel-riders ; "but you come from Aden. The quarrel of the tribes is with the lord of Aden. He is a vassal

only, and of small account. Moreover, yours is but a little company. We come from Ta'izz and Zabîd ; our train is of five hundred camels ; furthermore, we are the men of Ali es-Suleyhi, high chief of the Arabs, sovereign of Al Yaman. By Allah, not a dog in all their villages will dare so much as bark as we ride by. The rascals know too well the punishment. Say, have you need of food or anything ? Then fare you well. God will repay your loss ! ”

The lengthy train of camels moved anew.

“ What tidings of Zabîd ? ” asked Saïd of a passing phantom.

“ Talk—Talk ! ” came the reply. “ They say the time draws nigh when Saïd, the squint-eyed offspring of Najâh, will claim the kingdom. At Ta'izz I heard men say that he is in the country. I wish him ill, for our desire is peace.”

“ Didst hear that ? ” whispered Saïd to Abu Dad. “ By Allah, all is written, and the hour is near.”

Thereafter he was silent all the day, but ever his lips moved as if he spoke with some one, and sudden gestures told of his contained excitement.

Emerging from a wady which had held them for three days, they crossed a tableland with scattered villages, and by another valley reached the summit of a pass whence they could see the town and fortress of Ta'izz a good way off. Excitement preyed upon Saïd's spirit visibly. He kept on talking to himself, sometimes aloud, so that Abu Dad had fears lest their companion might discover everything. As they drew near Ta'izz the prince complained of dizziness and, looking in his face, the jester saw that he was fever-stricken. The poet, who had grown to love him as his eyes, shared to the full the grief of Abu Dad. Having kinsfolk in the town, this friendly youth insisted that the sick man should be taken to their house for rest and tendance. Abu Dad, though he had

grown to love the poet for his gentle manners, wished none the less with all his heart that they were rid of him. The danger of discovery was great.

The house to which he led them stood without the town, and was itself a little fortress, the abode of petty chiefs. They were admitted on their mere demand for shelter ; and it was not till they had been some minutes in the place, and the sick man had already been accommodated, that the owner, coming in to see them, recognized his sister's child. This recognition made them doubly welcome. A servant was sent out for a physician, and a feast was ordered for their entertainment. The poet left them on the following day, continuing his journey to Zabîd.

For three days Saïd lay ill, with mind distraught ; and Abu Dad sat by him night and day, in grief and harrowing anxiety. On the fourth day the fever had been overcome, but the patient was enfeebled and unfit to move. The master of the house came in to sit with him, as he had done each day of the delirium.

" Whence art thou ? " he inquired, " and what is thy name ? "

" I am a native of Zabîd ; my name is Saïd," replied the sick man weakly.

" Thou hast the colour of an Abyssinian ; but so, God knows, have thousands of the people there ; so many slaves of the Bani Ziyâd have borne dominion in Tehâmah, even before Najâh assumed the sovereignty. Men say that Saïd the Squinter will reclaim the kingdom. My nephew tells me that you come from Dahlak. What think you of the rumour which we hear on all hands to the effect that the son of Najâh is even now in Yaman ? "

" By Allah, I know nought of it. The prince was still in Dahlak when I was there."

" By Allah, that is true. He had no thought of leaving," corroborated Abu Dad.

"That well may be, and yet he may be here at present," said the Sheykh reflectively.

Neither by tone nor look had he at all suggested that he attached a personal significance to these inquiries. He left their presence with the kindest words. But Saïd and Abu Dad both groaned when he had gone.

"I seek refuge in Allah," said the latter with face buried in his hands. "Get well quickly, O beloved ; or our cause is lost. This person is, I think, a man of honour in the fashion of the Arabs. He will not betray us since we are his guests. But Allah knows he may reveal the truth to men less scrupulous."

"He has been a father to me, yet my soul distrusts him," said Saïd hopelessly.

"The best way with such a man," sighed Abu Dad, "would be to bind him by his honour to respect thy secret, should he ask the question." He added to his soul: "The choice is that, or kill him ; and Allah knows that I would save my lord from further crime."

## IV

ABU DAD roamed the streets of the town, with a despondent heart. The prince was better, or he would never have departed from his side a moment ; but the hopelessness of the whole enterprise on which they had embarked so rashly oppressed him like a wintry blast, making him shiver. They had been but three days in Ta'izz, yet already, as he feared, their secret was discovered. The face of Saïd, marked by the hand of God, was of itself an indication which could not be hid. If they fled from all who recognized it, they would know no rest ; yet they must flee or kill each fresh discoverer, in order to escape a cruel death. If only it had been Jeyyâsh instead of Saïd, he thought disconsolately, there might have been more prospect of success, for Jeyyâsh was of an ordinary type of countenance, and not so reckless of precaution as his brilliant brother. Time was when the jester would have risen to these difficulties as a swimmer rises on the crest of a great wave, when he would have laughed and framed some quaint device to overcome them. But now his brain was listless, he had no ideas. The sense of growing old dejected him.

It was late afternoon. The shade of the tall houses filled with gloom the narrow alleys full of stagnant odours, while high above, upon the house-tops, there was golden sunlight, breezy coolness, and the song of birds. He was strolling in profound despondency, asking Allah to relieve him of the anxious burden

which is life, when something fell within an inch of him. He looked. A squash of pink and green upon the stones informed him that it was a water-melon which had missed his head.

Then, glancing up, with bitter curses in his mouth, he saw a woman's head and bust protruding from an upper lattice. She smiled and beckoned to him. His heart bounded suddenly. Dejection, anger, vanished in a trice. By nature he was highly sensitive to female charms, and after all these days of travel in wild places, he felt as enterprising and as reckless as a youth. He rendered praise to Allah as he hastened up the stairs, cursing his fatness as a mere impediment. At the stairhead the woman stood awaiting him. She smiled and cried: "Thou dost not recognize me, O Sheykh Muhammad, surnamed Abu Dad!"

"By Allah, it is true; I know thee not!" he answered in surprise.

"Hast thou forgotten Fâtimah, the daughter of Billâl, who was thy neighbour in Zabîd—a little girl to whom thou wast a lord of kindness? Behold me now a widow, tried in life's vicissitudes, and known as Umm Selîm. My husband was a merchant of this town."

"Merciful Allah!" cried the jester. "Is it thou indeed, my sugar-plum, my little rosebud, so long lost? See how the sacred promise is fulfilled invariably, and good deeds are the seed of kindness in this sinful world. Plunged in the sea of troubles I had quite forgotten thee, and how I rescued thee from other children when they pinched and teased. And now thou art become the pearl of beauty which I now behold, and a widow of condition, praise to Allah! And thou hast dropped a melon on my head—events which well deserve to be recorded in facetious verse."

Henceforth he spent the most part of each day with Umm Selîm, relaxing his close watch upon his lord.



It always seemed to him that all was well so long as he himself was happy in his mind. The widow cooked him dainty meals, and made him presents of apparel. She was indeed a pearl of women. As he sat in her high lattice of an evening, watching the sunset glow upon the roofs and mountain-peaks, with meat and drink within his hand's reach, and Umm Selîm beside him, singing songs of love, it seemed to him that things could not be better.

The woman was a native of Zabîd, and of a family which owed its rise to the benevolence of King Najâh. He told her the whole secret on her oath of silence ; and she cried out in joy : " The praise to Allah ! Is it truth thou speakest ? I would give my ears and eyelids for a sight of him, the dear one ! He was robbed, thou sayest : has he need of gold ? In sh'Allah, he will slaughter the Suleyhi and destroy them utterly. I hate these mountain tribesmen with their airs and jealousies, though I am forced to live among them since my marriage. It is a shame that they should dominate a pious and a learned city like Zabîd. But "—she continued in a graver tone—"there is danger for our dear one here at present. Hast thou not heard that Ali es-Suleyhi and his queen the Lady Asma are expected to arrive to-morrow on a progress ? Already news has come that they have reached El Birkah, which is but four hours distant for a man on foot."

When Abu Dad, burdened with these tidings, appeared before the prince that evening, he found Saïd agitated.

" I seek refuge in Allah from the curiosity of that old man—I mean, our entertainer," he exclaimed despairingly. " Why, why wast thou not here, O Abu Dad ? He is such an honourable man and he has been so kind, that my own tongue betrays me when I would deceive him."

Saïd smote his face and groaned in great distress.

"What didst thou tell him, O my soul?" asked Abu Dad.

"He asked me whence we came, when, like a fool, I must embark upon the story we devised this morning about our being jurists from the land of Oman. Then, all at once, I recollected that I had already told him, and that his nephew likewise must have told him, that we came from Dahlak. I paused in great confusion."

"What said he?"

"He is a hospitable man; he did not press me. He spoke of other matters, but his face was grave."

"We must depart to-morrow," muttered Abu Dad, the charms of Umm Selîm, the comforts of her home, appealing to him all at once, like cries of children to a loving father. "Weak though thou art, we must not linger. We must vanish from his ken. He must suppose that he has seen a vision, dreamed a dream. For know, a greater danger threatens us. Thy father's murderer, thy house's foe, comes to Ta'izz to-morrow."

"Then, by the Lord Most High, we go not!" said the Squinter through clenched teeth. "The sight of his accursed face shall heal my sickness."

"Allah forbid!" cried out the jester fervently.

"We stay," replied the prince in tones which put an end to argument.

The heart of Abu Dad was torn between relief and terror at this resolution.

"Since thy heart is set on it," he murmured pensively, "though Allah knows it is the greatest madness—but since thy mind is fixed to take the risk . . . there is a widow, an old friend of mine, and thy adherent. She has a lattice high above the castle street."

"Allah increase thy wealth! Thou shalt conduct me thither."

Accordingly, upon the morrow, Saïd declaring that he felt much stronger and would smell the air, Abu Dad led him out ostensibly to view the town, but really to the upper room of Umm Selîm, who was enraptured at the honour. She kissed the prince's hand with tears of joy, and sent out for a host of delicacies, which she set before him. He did not touch the food. His dark face, thinned by illness, had a livid tinge; his lips moved ceaselessly as he kept peering through the lattice. When he turned towards his companions with some word, his squint, more marked than ever, seemed a sad disfigurement. His expression moved the woman to remark aside to Abu Dad:

"God grant he be not stricken with a fit when he beholds the enemy!"

"Have no fear!" replied the jester. "The sight will be a healing medicine to him."

And so it proved. For when the noise of many hoofs beating the cobbles of the street rang out below, Saïd's face grew bright upon the instant, and resumed the look of health. He opened a small wicket in the lattice and leaned forth. A group of riders, men and women, clad in splendid clothes, followed and preceded by a train of Arab lancers, advanced by two and two along the narrow way. Looking down upon the turbans and the head-veils Saïd could not see the likeness of these people till some flowers being thrown down upon them from a neighbouring roof, they all looked up, when he beheld their faces.

First came a man of formidable aspect, with a trim white beard, wearing a silken dust cloak and a mighty turban with aigrette and jewel; and a lady all in white and gold, whose face still bore the traces of some beauty.

"That is the Lady Asma," exclaimed Umm Selîm who had her face pressed close against the lattice. "There behind her is her son, Mukarram Ahmad—the great lazy oaf!—and at his side the lovely Sayyidah,

his wife, the wonder of the age as well for beauty as intelligence."

Saïd drew in his head. He had just gazed upon the fairest woman's face in all Arabia, yet he seemed displeased.

"Why do they look so proud?" he questioned angrily. "And why, in Allah's name, do they unveil such women?"

"It is because they are so proud," laughed Umm Selîm. "So highly placed, they think that no man upon earth would dare to covet them."

"In sh'Allah, we will wreck their pride," the prince said fiercely. "We will show those women that we are their lords in war and peace."

"In sh'Allah," echoed Umm Selîm and Abu Dad.

The judges and court functionaries were now passing in the street below; the woman named the chief of them as they went by; but Saïd paid no further heed to what she said.

He turned to Abu Dad, remarking:

"Praise to Allah, they are not ignoble. Had I beheld them of a puny, mean appearance, it would have depressed me, making my lawful vengeance seem a shame. Would that my dear Jeyyâsh had been with me this day!"

Umm Selîm was full of blessings when the king took leave. She called on Allah to reward his condescension.

"I know for certain that in times to come poets will sing the praise of this poor house of mine," she wailed forth in her exaltation, almost chanting. "The fame of this my humble lattice will be noised afar, and treasured up for the delight of future ages in the handwriting of the learned on the page of splendid books preserved in royal libraries; for thence the coming monarch of his age first looked upon the rival whom, with God's assistance, he destroyed."

Saïd thanked her kindly for her hospitality, and stated his intention to return next day.

"Fear nothing. She is to be trusted," Abu Dad assured his lord.

But after their departure, Umm Selîm ran out to call upon a friend of hers, by name Malîhah, the honour done to her poor room oppressing her, and seeming more than any woman of the seed of Adam could be asked to bear alone. Malîhah was a native of Zabîd. She swore by no means to divulge the secret ; but, after Umm Selîm had gone, she too became oppressed by its stupendous magnitude, and felt the need to share it with some kindred soul ; with the result that before sunset every native of Tehâmah who chanced to be at that time in Ta'izz had heard the story in embellished versions, which ascribed to Saïd an army of five thousand Abyssinians, with which, some said, he had reduced a fortress on the outskirts of the town belonging to a petty chief of the Suleyhi clan, whose name was given. The different versions being openly discussed, with speculations as to their respective verity, the story reached the mountain Arabs, partisans of the Suleyhi.

At night the Sheykh Abdullah ibn Malik, whose name was mentioned in these wild reports, received a visit from some friends of his, come to inform him of the rumour which disturbed the town. He smiled, assuring them with due solemnity that his house had not been taken by assault, nor even been approached by hostile men. But directly they had gone he went to Saïd and Abu Dad, and, after salutations, said to them :

"Depart at once ! God knows that it is in your interests that I command it. Some friends of mine have but this minute left me. They came to tell me of a rumour current in the city which associates my house with one Saïd, the son of Najâh, well known to

fame. The story is absurd, you say"—he looked at Abu Dad, who had exclaimed, severely—"but the Dâ'y Ali es-Suleyhi is at present in the city, and when he hears it, he may cause my dwelling to be searched. If the searchers should discover here a man of the complexion of an Abyssinian, of the name of Saïd, and squinting—though Allah knows the land contains, perhaps, a thousand such—I leave you to imagine what their thoughts would be. Nor could I then protect my guests, for I belong to Ali, and could not oppose my will to his direct command. Once more I say to you : Depart at once ! "

"We go," said Saïd, in accents of emotion. "Our Lord reward thee for thy kindness to us."

"That is but retaliation for your kindness to my sister's son upon the road from Aden. I beg you, thank me not, for we are enemies." Changing his tone for one of raillery, the Sheykh pursued : "Think not I am deceived. I knew you days ago. What I do now is not for thy love, O son of Najâh, but for the honour of the Arabs. Thou hast thy right to vengeance, if thou canst obtain it, for thy father, all men know, was foully slain. But we adhere to Ali es-Suleyhi, and I and all my house will do our utmost to frustrate your aims. Now follow me. The night is young, and I would not have guests be seen to leave my house at such an hour. There is a postern leading to the orchards. My son Suleymân is there to guide you."

A minute later they were walking under boughs of fig and olive trees between which they could see stars throbbing in a grape-blue sky. Suleymân, who strode before them with a lantern, said nothing till they reached the beaten road. There a servant of the house was waiting with a saddled stallion, which neighed and pranced as the three men drew near.

"Mount and away," he then advised them gruffly.

Saïd sprang into the saddle, bidding Abu Dad

climb up behind him, but the jester chose to walk, seeing the steed was fresh.

“Allah increase thy wealth,” both cried at once.

“Allah increase thy wealth and honour and preserve thy life, until I meet thee in the field with lance and sword, O Squinter ! ” answered Suleymân with savage emphasis.

## V

"YOUR HIGHNESS is not always mindful of his dignity," said Abu Dad, as he trudged wearily along behind his lord.

"That is true, by Allah," said the prince in some astonishment; "but why dost thou remark upon it at this moment?"

"It was not well to order me to mount behind thee in the presence of a barbarous enemy who, being only half a Muslim, attaches great importance to the claims of rank."

Their road descended through a winding gorge in darkness. The breeze which kissed their faces was quite warm, and laden with the fragrance of Tehâmah.

"No matter," answered Saïd. "I meant it well; and thou didst not obey me, so no harm was done."

"To travel two upon one steed," continued Abu Dad, "unless the second rider be a woman, is only for the baser sort, devoid of honour."

"Thy speech is truth, O father of sententiousness; yet he who rides on horseback has a manifest advantage over him who goes afoot."

"Allah is merciful!" sighed Abu Dad. "It is related of the Khalîfah Omar ibn el-Khattâb, acceptable to God, when he fared forth from Al Medînah in order to receive the homage of a conquered country, that he took with him one camel and a negro slave. The Khalîfah rode the camel for a space, then tied it to some tree or stone beside the way, and walked on with



his staff until the negro riding on the camel overtook and passed him. Then the servant in his turn would tie the camel, and the Khalîfah, coming to it, would remount and ride. It is a tradition perfectly authenticated and worthy of perpetual remembrance."

"Ah, now I see thy drift, old fox," the prince laughed out. "But what a long way thou hast travelled to advance an inch! Didst fear to ask outright?"

"To ask a point-blank question is like waking a man roughly. A man surprised may strike unthinkingly," said Abu Dad.

The prince reined in the stallion and dismounted, while Abu Dad climbed up into the saddle with a groan of vast relief, exclaiming:

"Praise to Allah! May thy walking be as fortunate as that of Omar ibn el-Khattâb, whom God accepted."

They journeyed on in silence till the dawn was up. By that time they had left behind the mountain gorge, and were in undulating lowland country, partly cultivated. They saw a village on an eminence and people coming out to work, knuckling their eyes. These made profound obeisance to Abu Dad.

"Our journey is like that of Omar ibn el-Khattâb, but thou art the Khalîfah, evidently, I the slave," quoth Saïd, overtaking him. Suddenly he cried: "Look at the horse! . . . Praise be to Allah for the honour of these mountain Arabs! He has given us the pick of all his stable and the richest housings!"

The face of Abu Dad expressed alarm. He hurriedly dismounted, saying:

"It is now thy turn to ride. The steed is too magnificent for use except by night."

"How to repay such generosity!" cried Saïd, still lost in admiration.

"In sh'Allah, thou wilt cut his head off—which

is fair payment between enemies—within the year. The question now is where to hide the beast."

"True," sighed the prince; "we must get rid of him, though Allah knows the parting rends my soul. The Suleyhi are at present lords of all the country, and all their slaves must know a horse like this." He stroked the stallion's nostrils while he spoke. "It were a sin to turn him loose for any rogue to capture."

"Defer decision for a while," said Abu Dad. "See! Here at no great distance is a lonely mosque. Let us go there and pray, and then take counsel."

The mosque was in a hollow of the land, near to a little grove of palm-trees. It consisted of a cloistered court, and a small oratory, the last surmounted by a shapely dome. No other building was in sight. The place had been erected solely for the use of wayfarers according to the pious custom of Islâm.

Having performed ablutions at the well outside the gate, and tied the horse's headrope to a stone, they went into the mosque to pray. Over the doorway was a fine inscription which they paused to read. It told them that the founder of the building was the poor slave of God and lover of the poor, Najâh, the ruler of Al Yaman under the Khalîfah.

"The hour is fortunate for thee," said Abu Dad, impressed by the coincidence. "But, hush! I hear a murmur. There is some one here."

Saïd peered into the dimness of the little mosque, and saw a man with a large turban standing at prayers against the kiblah with his back towards them. Banishing from their minds all thoughts of earth, the travellers assumed the same position; nor did they again observe the man until, their duty ended, they went out again into the court and sat down to put on their footgear. The Sheykh was still at his devotions near the kiblah.

"He dwells here," whispered Abu Dad, "for look,

there is a bed beneath the arches yonder. By Allah, we will make him mind the horse. Leave all to me. I shall inform him that thou art a captain in the hosts of the Suleyhi. All their hireling troops are Abyssinian."

"The troops of the Suleyhi are in truth my people," answered Saïd bitterly. "And yet they serve my father's murderer for hire."

"But they would rather serve thee if thou hadst the kingdom. In the moment when thou strikest they will turn to thee."

"Hush!" whispered Saïd. "The man comes forth." He added with compassion: "He is blind, the poor one!"

"Praise be to Allah!" answered Abu Dad. "I shall persuade him that it is a donkey we entrust to him."

The blind man came out, feeling for the doorway, and found his staff, which leaned against the wall outside.

"Peace be upon thee!" called out Abu Dad.

"On thee be peace, and the mercy of God, and His blessings. But say, are there not two of you? I cannot see."

His perfect blindness was apparent, for his gaze in their direction was level at the height where a man's face would be supposing he stood upright, though they were seated plum before him in the morning sunlight.

"Yes, there are two of us, and we require a boon of thee."

"Ask, in God's name," replied the Sheykh benevolently.

"We have with us a donkey which we do not need. We have attached him yonder by the well. We beg thee to accept him as an alms from us."

"Is he then stolen?" said the Sheykh suspiciously.

"Nay; he was a gift from one who loved us dearly. But my companion is a pious man. He is conscious of much evil in his life, and fain would expiate it by rich gifts to men like thee."

"Our Lord increase his wealth! What like is he? He has not spoken. I would hear his voice."

"By Allah, if he were to speak, thou wouldst be terrified. By my beard, it is a blessing that thou canst not see him. He is a giant ten feet high and with a voice like thunder. And yet, within, he is compact of all benignity."

"Ma sh'Allah!" cried the holy man in great astonishment. "Are there in the world such men? The Lord have mercy on them! With pleasure and thanksgiving I accept the donkey. A friend comes hither from the village every day to bring me food and other necessities. He will tend the beast. . . . Ma sh'Allah! Ten feet high! A jinni, not a man! Can such things be?"

"Nay, more than that, hast thou not heard, my uncle, how Saïd the son of Najâh was borne across the sea to Yaman only yesterday, upon a jinni's back? He is at present in the country, none know where. The jann have risen as one man on his behalf. They play strange pranks upon the friends of the Suleyhi, transforming them from men to beasts, and changing the appearance of their cattle, driving them mad through sheer bewilderment. Those Arabs seek the Squinter always, but they cannot find him, for he is hidden by the people underground."

"The name of God be round about us! . . . And will there, think you, be a war between the devils and mankind?"

"That war is raging even now so fiercely that none can tell when he sets out at daybreak, whether he will not be changed into a coney or an owl, or buried living by the jann before the night. At this very moment

I hear a rustling as of great wings overhead. I behold Saïd the son of Najâh borne over plain and mountain on a demon's wings. Merciful Allah, my heart fails me. . . . Rise, O my brother. Let us hasten hence ! ”

“ Nay, stay ! I pray you, stay ! ” implored the hermit, following them towards the gate with slow, uncertain tread.

But already the two travellers had passed the threshold. The stallion screamed at sight of them. The blind man gave a cry : “ I hear the noise of cavalry.”

“ It is only Saïd the Squinter with his demon host,” replied the jester. “ Fear nothing. Pray to Allah. They attack not righteous people.” And he made off as quickly as his legs would carry him, followed at a distance by the prince, who kept protesting that it was a shame to treat a blind man so, and urging that they should go back and make apology. But Abu Dad assured him that no harm was done ; the man would think himself bewitched for many days, and then recover. In the meanwhile he would have told the story of Saïd the Squinter and his demon army, which, spreading awe through all the country, would prepare the road for their success.

When at length they reached the palm-groves of Zabîd at evening, Abu Dad had lost the will and power to be facetious.

It was the season of great heat, and everywhere among the trees were tents and booths in which the townsfolk spent the night for coolness. The noise of many voices, those of children dominating, filled the groves, together with the beat of little drums and twang of lutes. The fire of sunset glowed between the palm-trunks. Shrouding their faces against recognition, the travellers passed through the heart of this great concourse to the city gate, a noble archway in a tower which there projected from the line of battlemented

wall. Before the gate there was a shrine, a gem of architecture, with fig-shaped dome elaborately fluted, and walls adorned with arabesque designs. Saïd sat down on the doorstep of this sanctuary. "Go thou into the city," he told Abu Dad ; "find out our faithful Kheyr-ud-dîn and bring him hither. For me, my limbs are weary and my mind a blank."

"To hear is to obey," replied the jester faintly. He was tired to death.

When he had gone, the prince gave one last look into the palm-grove where, amid the stems like columns and the moving throng, a multitude of lamps had now been lighted. Above the foliage he saw the silver moon embedded in a sky of amethyst. Then all things swam before his eyes ; the murmur of the crowd grew indistinct. He lay down and, burying his face in both his arms, fell fast asleep.

The sound of talking close at hand at length aroused him.

"Praise be to Allah !" a deep voice was saying. "It is a miracle, and of good omen, as it seems to me."

"Peace upon thee, O Kheyr-ud-dîn, O best of men !" Saïd murmured drowsily.

His hands were seized and kissed ; he felt them wet with tears ; and then, emotion overcoming his respect, Kheyr-ud-dîn hugged the prince and kissed his brow repeatedly. "Praise be to Allah, that I hold thee once again, O son of all our expectations," he exclaimed in a low tone. "I was this minute saying to the Sheykh Muhammad that it is a miracle that we should find thee sleeping in this very place."

"Why ? " questioned Saïd, still only half-awake.

"Dost thou not recognize this shrine—the fairest in the world ? It is the tomb which thy exalted father, gone to Allah's mercy, caused to be erected over the remains of the young king and the princess his guardian so foully murdered by the beast Nafis. And yonder—

deign to look where I am pointing—close to the gate is the protrusion of the wall which marks the spot where he immured the dead Nafis together with Marjân the living, the same spot where they had walled alive their sovereign lord. I say, by Allah, that it is a wonder for all time to come that I should find thee sleeping on these steps. Now come, I have a mule in waiting. I will conduct thee to a place of perfect safety—my own poor dwelling by the river-bank.”

“Yes, hasten, O my lord !” said Abu Dad.

As they went along, with Saïd on the mule’s back slumbering by fits and starts, Kheyr-ud-dîn inquired about Jeyyâsh and the princess Dhakhîrah, and all the dear ones left behind in Dahlak ; and Abu Dad informed him of their state.

## VI

THE city of Zabîd in those days was a seat of learning, to which students came from all parts of Arabia and East Africa. History, geography, astrology, literature, medicine, besides, and in conjunction with, religious law, were deeply studied in its mosques and colleges by men whose names were known throughout the Muslim world. The doctors of Zabîd were Sunnite to a man ; indeed the city was a tower of orthodoxy ; yet the heretics consulted them on points of doctrine, and sent their children to be educated in their schools. And now that the Shî'a had obtained political supremacy, and a Shî'ite governor was in the royal palace, they half-scornfully and half-indulgently admitted men of loose opinions to preach on Friday in the greater mosques, since it was decreed that in the introduction to the sermon prayerful mention should be made of one whom they accounted an impostor. Thus, without the least guilt of apostacy, they were able to conform to the existing order, and receive the gifts of the heretical Ali es-Suleyhi, as they had received those of Najâh the orthodox. The poets, when they wished to earn a trifle, wrote in praise of the Suleyhi or his governor, and one of them remarked in public, with a shrug and smile, that it was a blessing they were men possessed of some good qualities, since they must be eulogized.

The fact was that the Learned of Zabîd—a term including half the population, for education in the



public schools was free to all—considered all the children of ambition and their works as utterly unworthy the attention of a serious person.

“What are they in the sight of Allah?” said a great professor, when a student asked him wherefor, in his history of a certain country, he made no mention of its kings and famous warriors. “They come and go. It is of infinitely more importance to record the sayings of the learned, the achievement of the poets and the men of letters, the example of the pious and the growth of mosques and schools, which long endure.”

And so it was with all the erudite. They looked upon the wars waged by the barbarous Arabs of the highlands and the Abyssinian mercenaries with a wondering contempt, which changed to anger if by chance the peaceful population suffered wrong because of them. Wars between Muslims, unless by high authority and for the redress of well-authenticated public wrong, were sinful and forbidden by the Word of God. The strife of private greed or vengeance was unjustifiable. Thus it happened that the people of Zabîd, though they preferred the house of Najâh, the champion of the Abbasides, to the house of Es-Suleyhi, who proclaimed the false Khalîfah, were not prepared to raise a hand to help the former.

All this, in simple language, with abundant curses on the public apathy, Kheyr-ud-dîn told the prince upon the morning after his return, as they sat together in the house, a poor one, which Kheyr-ud-dîn, who, by profession, was the leader of the public showmen, had built outside the town upon the river-bank.

“At present,” he concluded, “Allah knows I cannot find thee twenty partisans in all this city. It shames my soul to say it in the hearing of our rightful king. And yet the weakness tells both ways, for if God grants us but an hour’s success the people as one man will turn to thee. I might find at this moment twenty

persons in Zabîd who will support thee to the death. It is not many. But be assured there is not one prepared to give his life for the Suleyhi. Nor in the highlands have they lovers save the men of their own clan. When thy star rises, as it will in sh'Allah, the conquered tribes will hail its rising as their dawn of day."

The wife of Kheyr-ud-dîn put in : " Despair not, O my lord. Allah gives victory to whom he chooses, and our cause is just. It seems to me that all is well since thou art here. The breeze has whispered to us of thy coming all these years ; the pigeons in our yard there sang of it, the river and the palm trees kept remembrance of our dear ones."

" By the Corân, my mother speaks the truth," agreed the son of Kheyr-ud-dîn, who sat beside the wall, devouring Saïd with his eyes. " All is now well, since thou hast come to us, O summit of benevolence, though Allah knows the honour is too great for our poor house."

" Our Lord reward you all ! " said Saïd feelingly. " Your welcome makes the house luxurious to one so long a wanderer."

" But, by my life, your Grace must not remain here," muttered Kheyr-ud-dîn. " It is too public. We have but this room here, and one beyond ; and people come to see me every minute about affairs connected with the different shows—low people, full of curiosity and apt to talk. Let me consider ! Where can we bestow thee ? "

" I care not," answered Saïd, " so it be near to you."

" Near it must be, that I may bring thee food," said Kheyr-ud-dîn, with knitted brow ; and then sat long in silence, deeply meditating.

The devotion of this common fellow, once a mountebank, in the service of the exiled princes, had become

proverbial. It had originated years before when Najâh the Abyssinian, at that time captain of the palace guard, had found the tumbler left for dead by the roadside, and taken pity on his helpless plight. From that day forward Kheyr-ud-dîn became his willing slave ; and when Najâh obtained the kingdom he contrived to benefit his humble friend in secret ways. The treacherous murder of Najâh, the suicide of King Muarik, the sufferings and exile of the royal family, distressed this simple creature to the verge of madness. Only the sense of Allah's boundless mercy surrounding the vicissitudes of human life sustained him. For him the Suleyhi faction were the enemies of God ; the persecution of the house of Najâh was as the persecution of the holy family. His probity was quite above suspicion. He had preserved a hundred thousand gold dînârs, confided to him by the king Muarik ere he died, and had paid them faithfully into the hands of Prince Jeyyâsh when the latter came at peril of his life to claim them. All that concerned the exiled family was sacred to him.

It was therefore with religious exaltation that he welcomed Saïd's return ; prepared to sacrifice himself and all his family, if necessary, to defend the prince's person or assert his claims. And yet he wished that it had been Jeyyâsh who had returned the first in order to prepare the way for Saïd, the genius of the family, whose gift was more to lead an army than recruit one. Jeyyâsh was generally patient ; Saïd impetuous, a dreamer of bright dreams, at times inspired. Also, his squinting made it harder to conceal him than it would have been to hide his brother, who had no such mark. Had his guest but been Jeyyâsh instead of Saïd, he thought regretfully, he need not now have racked his brains so hard to find a hiding-place. At length he raised his eyes from staring at the ground and said : " By Allah, I can think of nowhere better

than my garden here. But none must know the place except we four here present."

"And Abu Dad," suggested Saïd.

"He least of all! He is a good man, that is known, but an unguarded talker. I think it fortunate that he is absent in the town. Fear nothing, I will make him understand the need of secrecy."

It was Kheyr-ud-dîn's infirmity to be absurdly jealous of those who had accompanied the princes to their place of exile. He believed them to be all self-seekers, and bitterly compared their pleasant life at Dahlak with the difficulties of his own existence in Zabîd. Especially he felt distrust of Abu Dad, because the jester in old days used to make fun of him in a manner absolutely unintelligible, and so exasperating, to his honest brain. It was with the sense of fighting a malignant influence that he opposed Saïd's wish that Abu Dad should know his hiding-place; and with religious triumph, having gained his point, that he made fast the garden door behind the prince, driving the wooden bolt well home into its socket in the wall.

The garden was a mud enclosure walled so high that only plumes and fruit of neighbouring palm trees could be seen from thence. Ducking to avoid low-hanging boughs of fruit-trees, he led Saïd to the entrance of a watchman's shed.

"Here is thy dwelling, O Magnificence!" he said. "It shall be cleansed and furnished for thy rest ere night."

"I love the hum of bees," said Saïd, listening. "By Allah, thou hast chosen just the place for me. Thou spakest of a project. Tell me! I would lose no time."

"Haste is from the devil," answered Kheyr-ud-dîn.

They sat down in the shadow of some plantains. He continued:

"I have taken the advice of great astrologers, who

all agree in saying that thy hour of fortune falls somewhere in the last days of the coming spring. We have leisure, therefore, to mature a plan."

Saïd gave an exclamation of annoyance. "Well, what dost thou propose?" he asked indifferently.

Kheyr-ud-dîn proceeded to unfold his plan. Beginning from that day he would frequent the greater mosques, the taverns and all places in which people congregate, where he would raise the subject of the exiled dynasty, classifying men by the opinions which they risked in public and noting those who seemed best suited to his purpose. With these he would establish further intercourse. As often as he made a partisan, and bound him by a dreadful oath of secrecy, he would arrange for Saïd to visit the new convert in circumstances sure to fill him with religious awe. In the meanwhile Abu Dad, that famous joker, might mystify the common people and the Government by pranks which should appear to be the work of devils. Thus supernatural fear would incapacitate their foes at the same time that their friends were filled with supernatural courage. Showmen were always on the road between Zabîd and Sanaa; they all brought in reports to Kheyr-ud-dîn, who was their head. Thus he would be informed of every movement of the enemy.

"But have I then no part in all thy scheme?" the king protested. "Suppose I die of inactivity before the plot is ripe!"

"Fear nothing, O my lord! Thy part is not a small one. Nor shalt thou be imprisoned all the while. But thy name and nickname must not once be mentioned in our counsels. By what name now shall we refer to thee?"

"But thou hast spoken only of the common people. I would fain have the approval of the Learned, for I myself am something of a scholar and a poet too, though not of the distinction of Jeyyâsh my brother."

“Have I not said? Hope nothing from them! They despise ambition, and scoff at me, a man of no instruction, for contending that our business is the cause of God. There is only one of them who takes an interest in such affairs, and that is Abdul Halîm the historian, whom I know well, since he has a passion for beholding shows, and has even penned a book about the travelling showmen of Arabia, proving our trade to be of great antiquity. In the same way he has a hankering for great events. On the morning when our cause was overthrown, they say that he went out to view the battle, mounted on an ass, with nothing but a sunshade for protection, and nearly met his death in consequence. I have heard him bitterly complain that, since your honour left us, nothing at all has happened in Zabîd. Did he but know that thou art here, conspiring, he would give his fortune for a sight of thee.”

“Approach him in the name of Allah!” answered Saïd, “and if he much desires it we will visit him. Now leave me; I will sleep here in the shade.”

Kheyr-ud-dîn obeyed, remaining absent till an hour before the sunset when, re-entering the garden, he beheld no king. He sought awhile in vain, then moaned aloud:

“Allah protect him! Lord have mercy on us! He is gone!”

“Allah protect thee also,” said a mocking voice, seeming to come from the direction of the clump of plantains. “Look once again, more keenly. Canst thou see me?”

“No, by Allah!”

“That is well. Come now and look, beloved! I have made a hole and if, in making it, I have destroyed a plant or two, multiply their value by a thousand, and account it to me.”

In the very centre of the growth of plantains the

prince had dug a hole shaped like a grave, but deeper, the earth from which he had dispersed so widely that it made no heap. The hole was furnished with a lid of palm-leaves which could be removed at will.

"Thy lodge is open on all sides save one," the king explained. "I saw from it, above the wall, a palm-tree top with fruit just ripe, and I said in my soul: 'O soul, to-morrow early men will climb that tree to pluck that fruit. They will espy a stranger sleeping in this garden, and there will be talk.' Therefore I took a mattock which I found near by and made the house thou seest."

"Allah preserve thy hands!" cried Kheyr-ud-dîn, transformed by admiration. "Now is thy surname found. Thou art 'the digger' and 'the dweller underground' in all our counsels. Men, overhearing, will suppose we name some jinni—the name of God be round about us!—they will think us mad."

"So be it then," said Saïd, with a yawn. "Now bring me food, for I am hungry from this work."

## VII

THE mosque of Ibrahîm at Zabîd, one of the four cathedral mosques the city boasted, stood in relation to the streets adjoining it as a great hall to its surrounding corridors. Out of the gloom of covered ways and bustle of the markets men passed by any one of five great gates into a court of arches full of sunlight and the coo of doves. Here, also, was the song of running water, for a portion of the river of Zabîd, rushing in a marble channel, filled a basin in the centre of the court, and then escaped through a low arch beneath the southern cloister. On the north side of the courtyard stood the mosque itself, a noble building, and under the arcade around the square were many alcoves used for lectures and discussions of the Learned. The wheeling of a host of pigeons made a shimmer overhead and flecked the pavement of the court with flying shadows; and their soft voices mingled with the chanting of the words of God which ceased not, day or night, within those precincts.

Here it was that the doctors of the Hanafite college met for discussion, and heard causes, every day; and here Kheyr-ud-dîn found Abdul Halîm, the great historian, between the afternoon and sunset hours of prayer. The Sheykh was seated in an alcove of the southern cloister, the centre of a circle of disciples whom he treated scornfully.

"Is it thou, O Kheyr-ud-dîn?" he cried, acknowledging the salutation of the new arrival. "Sit down



and hold thy peace, for, by the Lord, my ears have had enough of senseless chatter."

Kheyr-ud-dîn, smiling, did as he was told, content to wait the pleasure of a known eccentric.

The conversation was on rumour in relation to historic truth; one of those present, a poor camel-driver, having come to the Sheykh Abdul Halîm with a tale about the glory of his family in ancient days, on which he wished to found a claim to certain property. When asked on what authority he made the statement, he replied that it was on the word of one Muhammad son of Ali, a poor man and a camel-driver like himself. Asked where that man was to be found at present, he answered that he did not know.

The Sheykh derided the whole tale, declaring: "Just as well might I lay claim to the chief power in Yaman, because the beggar at the gate there told me I was kingly. Now, had it been the angel Gabriel who spoke with thee, or had the witness vanished in a cloud, then might there be some reason to regard his saying, since evidently he would be possessed of supernatural knowledge. Yet even in that case thou couldst not base a legal claim upon such evidence alone, since for a legal claim thou must produce two human witnesses."

"None the less do I believe he spoke the truth, O sea of learning," grumbled the camel-driver, "for he spoke as one who clears his conscience of a load."

"Keep that opinion if thou desirest, but hide thy thought from all mankind lest ill betide thee."

"By Allah, that is wise advice," came from the group of students.

"The property, I say, is mine of right. Those who now hold it seized it wrongfully, at the moment when the highland Arabs took this city from the people of Najâh."

Kheyr-ud-dîn sat beyond the threshold of the alcove, under the arcade. He had been throwing

maize which he had brought with him out to the pigeons, attending to the conversation with but half an ear. But at the mention of Najâh he turned his gaze upon the camel-driver—a little thick-set man with beetling brows, whose face announced a grievance and much native obstinacy.

“Thou art an ass,” replied the great historian. “Who heeds the saying of a passer-by upon the road? The whole tale, in my opinion, is imaginary. Thus and no otherwise, my children, are formed the legends which pass current with the common herd. They are produced by men devoid of understanding yet not without some genius of invention. Take an instance, connected with that same Najâh of whom thou spakest. How often in the last five years have people come to me, declaring upon oath, that Saïd ul-Ahwal, claimant to the throne, was in the country? That Squinter has indeed appeared to many, were one to trust report. Our head-strong friend would call those stories true since persons were prepared to swear to their veracity. But were we to accept them we should be compelled to the belief that Saïd ul-Ahwal is not of the seed of Adam, since he has the faculty of flying through the air, of traversing vast tracts of country in the twinkling of an eye, of vanishing, and, which is more remarkable, of being in two far-distant places at one and the same instant—a gift not yet bestowed on either man or jinni. Thus I conclude such stories to be mere invention born of the desire for strange events which is inordinate in the simpler kind of people who possess no store of learning to amuse the mind. What think you? Say, am I right or wrong in so concluding? There is present one who can decide for us. O Kheyi-ud-dîn, most faithful of adherents, inform me plainly, I adjure thee, is there any truth in these reports which come to me from time to time to the effect that Saïd the Squinter is in Yaman?”

"By Allah, since they never reached my ears, I am ready to accept thy judgment of them, O renowned for perspicacity. And yet, with thy permission, I ascribe their origin rather to the love which men in secret cherish for the exiled dynasty than to a mere desire for strange events."

"Thou lovest them, and so thou thinkest all men love them. Thou dreamest, O my son. Wake up, and look around thee! Question people in the city here, where they did good to multitudes and harm to none. Is there any one beside thyself and thine own family who would risk his life by going out to fight for them?"

The camel-driver coughed and cleared his throat, shifting his seat uneasily.

"By Allah, I would fight for them," he said, "if there appeared but one kirât \* of hope of victory."

"Mark well that man!" exclaimed the Sheykh Abdul Halîm. "For, in his person, there, before you, in the flesh, sits personal ambition, though in humble garb—the cause of all the evil in the world. He reckes as little as does Saïd the Squinter how many of God's creatures are destroyed, how many learned men are put to inconvenience, how merchants suffer in their traffic, or the schools are emptied. He would have war, in order that he may attain his selfish ends."

"I would see justice triumph, even though I have to fight for it," replied the camel-driver doggedly, abashed to find himself the object of all eyes. "Now, with permission, O my masters, I will go, since I have heard the sage's verdict on my case."

"Go in safety, and may God preserve thee," said the great historian.

As the camel-driver in his way out passed by Kheyr-ud-dîn, the latter whispered, "Tell me thy name, in kindness, O my brother."

\* A kirât is the twenty-fourth part of anything.

" My name is Hasan, called the Lute-player."

" Where to be found ? "

" At the inn of Abu Shukûr in the Bâb Tehâmah quarter."

" Good."

Kheyr-ud-dîn watched his form recede across the sunlit court and vanish in the darkness of a street without, and fell into a reverie, from which he was recalled by the voice of the historian, exclaiming graciously :

" Thou hast uttered scarce a word, O best of showmen ; and yet, in thy profession, thou hast seen sights worth relating. Draw near, and let us hear a tale from thee."

Kheyr-ud-dîn rose and made obeisance, but begged to be excused. " There is a word which I would speak in private to your reverence. Till that may be, I ask thy leave to sit apart and listen."

" I return to my house before the sunset prayer. Wait and walk with me," said the great historian.

Kheyr-ud-dîn again saluted reverently. He sat upon the outskirts of the group another hour, giving a half-ear to their conversation when intelligible, watching the pigeons whirl like flecks of foam on the blue sky.

## VIII

ABDUL HALÎM at length arose, dismissing the assembly. He left abruptly as beseems a great one. Kheyr-ud-dîn followed him at a respectful distance until he passed the gateway of the mosque, when he came up on his left side and whispered :

“ Saïd ul-Ahwal has returned, the praise to Allah ! ”

The Sheykh stopped dead. “ Ma sh’Allah ! ” he exclaimed. Then, turning sharply, he seized Kheyr-ud-dîn by both his shoulders and gazed fixedly into his eyes, exclaiming : “ Is it truth thou speakest ? Saïd the Wily in Zabîd ; and thou hast seen him ? ”

“ By the life of the Prophet ! ”

“ Couldst thou take me to him, or peradventure, bring him to my house ? I beg it of thee. In a few months, if Allah wills it, he may be a potentate. Swear, O my dear, to make me known to him ! It shall be worth thy while.”

“ The thing is possible. I will attempt it. . . . I need not warn thee, O my lord, to keep this hid.”

“ No leaf, no stone shall hear it from me ! . . . I have long desired to have the intimacy of some king or public malefactor in order to explore the secret of events.”

“ Be sure that I will do my best to please your Honour. Do thou, on thy side, labour to incline the Learned, were it but a little, in my dear one’s favour.”

“ We all favour him ! Who is against him in Zabîd ? I pray thee, name the man ! ”

"Your Honour's self remarked an hour ago that I and my poor house alone were for him!"

"O destitute of all intelligence! We spoke of fighting. Not one of us would fight for him or any man against a fellow-Muslim. But we all are people of the Sunnah; and it vexes us to hear the sermon given every Friday in the name of an impostor and a foe to orthodoxy. We all would rather have a Sunni ruler. This Saïd is the successor of Najâh, who was the properly appointed representative of the Khalîfah, besides a pious Muslim as kings go. . . . Tell me, does this young man truly squint or is it but a slight cast of the eyes?"

"He squints completely."

"And yet men say that he is beautiful! Praise be to the author of all wonders! In the hour when I stand face to face with him, I give thee ten dînârs."

Kheyr-ud-dîn left the sage at his house door, and sauntered to the Bâb Tehâmah quarter, where, at a hostelry, he made inquiry for a certain Hasan called the Lute-player. An ostler fetched him. They conversed in eager whispers.

"Be sure of me," exclaimed the proselyte at length. "I will work for him as for my parents. May God grant us victory! I will find out others and report their names to thee. In sh'Allah, we shall soon have raised a goodly host!"

"In sh'Allah!" echoed Kheyr-ud-dîn with less conviction.

Returning towards his house after this business, Kheyr-ud-dîn was met by Abu Dad, whom he had quite forgotten.

"Where is our lord?" inquired the jester in an outraged tone. "The mother of thy son disclaims all knowledge of his whereabouts. She says that it is known only to thee. Conduct me to him, I command thee, instantly."

"It may not be," sighed Kheyr-ud-dîn regretfully. "Our lord himself forbids it for the sake of safety. He charged me with a loving message for your Honour. 'Let Abu Dad,' said he, 'repose himself. Let him secure some pleasant lodging in the city, and promote my cause among the educated people by his wit.' Those were his gracious words. He sent his love to thee."

"How know I that thou speakest truth? A word in his handwriting would have been more valuable."

"In my poor house there is no means of writing."

"But I must see him, for I have our money—what is left of it."

"That he bestows upon thee for thy living and to assist thy schemes on his behalf."

"The Lord increase his wealth! And yet I know not. . . . Why should he hide from me, the comrade of his travels?"

"I think his care is chiefly for your Honour's health," replied the tactful showman. "The life he has to lead in hiding is a very hard one."

"The Lord reward him!" said the jester, half-convinced. "To hear is to obey. I will secure a lodging. And yet—and yet—I do not understand!"

It was already night when Kheyr-ud-dîn, having carried food to Saïd in the garden, came back to his own house. A donkey stood at rest before the door, upon its back some person much wrapped up. A servant standing by the donkey's head, dangled a lantern, whose illumination of the ground did not extend above the ass's belly.

"Is it thou, O shameless loiterer?" exclaimed the donkey-rider. "O Khâlid, raise the lantern! Let him see my face!" It was the great historian.

"Retire, O Khâlid," he commanded, and then, leaning close to Kheyr-ud-dîn, exclaimed: "I have been thinking of our talk this evening, and I have come to bid thee have no fear: I will befriend him."

My lifelong study of the fate of nations has fully qualified me for the conduct of a great conspiracy. Left to yourselves, unguided, you would fail through inexperience. You would start fighting without money or alliances. A deputation must be sent to Baghdad to obtain the sanction of the true Khalifah. The governors of all the strongholds and the highland kings must secretly be lured from their allegiance. Leave that to me, I know the best examples."

"Such matters are too high for me," said Kheyr-ud-dîn. "I bring his Highness to thy house to-morrow. Talk to him."

"Our Lord reward thee! But yet listen. Our first need is money. We must lay our project scientifically, to ensure success."

"To hear is to obey, O sea of learning!"

"Come, O Khâlid!"

The servant came and took the donkey's head, holding the lantern forward to throw up the path; and the great historian returned towards the city, leaving Kheyr-ud-dîn convulsed with inward laughter.



## IX

IN the neighbourhood of the mosque of Ibrahîm, Abu Dad had found a house—a good-sized room with kitchen and a tiny court dependent on it—which he furnished comfortably. Then he set the match-makers to work to find for him some charmer whose presence might endear his new abode. He valued widows for their cunning and experience; and was fortunate enough to meet with one by nature joyous and able to appreciate his turn for drollery. In her society his spirits rose; his brain began to teem with quaint inventions; he felt young again.

One thing only marred his happiness, and that was the belief that Kheyr-ud-dîn was somehow tricking him through private spite. He told his consort that he had an enemy who was keeping from him an important secret which concerned his life.

“I am fat and easily fatigued. God knows I cannot follow him in all his walks. And I am undisguisable,” he sighed.

“Point out the man to me, my water-melon,” she replied. “A woman in her veils is never noticed.”

“Dost know by sight the captain of the showmen, Kheyr-ud-dîn?”

“Do I know by sight the tomb of King Najâh?”

That very evening she was able to inform him: “He prayed at sunset in the mosque of Abu 'l-Jeysh; and after prayers another joined him from among the worshippers, whose face I could not see for it was

muffled in a shawl. But he was tall and had the step of youth. Then they went out together and I followed, keeping sight of them, until they went at length into a certain garden, whence Kheyr-ud-dîn came forth alone a minute later."

"Didst mark the garden?"

"Thou canst not miss it after my description."

Some three days later, at the peep of dawn, Abu Dad scaled the high mud wall by means of a rope-ladder made of palm-fibre, and searched the garden, but could see no trace of Saïd. He returned completely mystified—a feeling which was much increased when he encountered Kheyr-ud-dîn advancing towards the garden with a tray of food.

"Ha, ha! I know the secret!" he called out to tease him.

Kheyr-ud-dîn set down the tray deliberately and came close up to him.

"Listen, O beloved!" he said very gravely. "Thou art a clever man and amiable; and many love thee for thy gift of jesting. It were a pity thou shouldst perish suddenly; yet that will be thy fate if thou dost not beware. The matter which I have in keeping is so great, the need of secrecy so urgent, that the punishment for prying can be only death."

"Be silent, foolish boaster! Who dare touch me."

"I dare all things in the service of the cause of God."

The jester's teeth were chattering as he retreated homeward, nor could all the arts of the accomplished widow restore to him his wonted spirits on that day. Like many men of wit he hated violence. The very thought of it would chill the marrow in his bones. To spy on Kheyr-ud-dîn was dangerous, he now perceived; nor could he hope to get an audience of the prince, whose mind was doubtless set against him by the brutal showman.

"Well, he would show them that he was not

despicable. He also would be active in the prince's cause.

His spouse had introduced him to her brothers and her uncle—lewd rogues in love with every kind of fun which may consist with safety. Abu Dad took counsel with these persons, who were now his boon companions.

A chamberlain belonging to the household of the governor, when going out one night according to his wont to pay a visit to a certain lady, was beset by men disguised who dragged him from his horse and ducked him in a cesspool while a voice cried : " Swear fidelity to Saïd al-Ahwal, or else drown." The man swore as he was bidden, in order to escape that horrid death. A sycophant and a reputed spy of the Suleyhi met with the same treatment. The guard at the Tehâmah gate was driven from the gatehouse by a swarm of hornets which came into the room none knew from whence. They ran into the city, crying murder. When they returned the gate was set wide open. People said that Saïd the Squinter with an army of the jinn had entered in the absence of the guard. Another night the sentry at the palace-gate was spirited away by demons, as he solemnly averred next morning, when he was discovered bound and blindfold on the minaret of an adjacent mosque. On the palace front was an inscription newly painted in the Kufic character. A number of the learned came to read it. It ran thus :

" The ass intrudes within the lion's den.  
Let him depart. The noble beast returns."

The governor of Zabîd, who was the brother-in-law of Ali es-Suleyhi, a just and amiable man, laughed when informed of its significance and had it scraped away. But as the nightly pranks continued, and the name of Saïd the Squinter was associated with them in the public mind, he thought it proper to report the

matter to the court at Sanaa, with the result that the garrison was shortly strengthened by a thousand men.

"A pretty service thou hast rendered to our cause!" said Kheyr-ud-dîn to Abu Dad whom he, by chance, encountered in the street soon after the arrival of these reinforcements.

"If thou hast a box of money in thy house," replied the jester, "it is of the essence of precaution to possess another box to be mistaken for it. The plot before their eyes has nothing in it. The more they search the less they will discover."

"Allah is gracious!" answered Kheyr-ud-dîn; "but I have more than half a mind to break thy head."

The troops which had been sent to reinforce the garrison were Abyssinian to a man. The veterans among them had been soldiers of Najâh and certain of the caïds were known to Abu Dad. He ascertained that they did not object to jokes against the Government, provided they themselves were never made to look ridiculous. So the games continued. The band of jokers under Abu Dad now numbered twelve light-hearted individuals. On the occasion of the Feast of Sacrifice, the governor caused the green flag of the followers of the Obeydites to be flown on the high places of the city. At a given moment—at high noon when men seek shelter—it was everywhere replaced by the black banner of the Abbasides. Great was the excitement of the population when the substitution was observed. The change was hailed as of good omen by the multitude of Sunnites; and as these were the vast majority of the inhabitants, the governor, for fear of grave disturbances, allowed the black flags to remain till after dark.

"Thou hast done well for once; our lord is pleased," said Kheyr-ud-dîn, happening to meet the jester in the mosque of Abu 'l-Jeysh. "This latest joke of

thine delights the learned. There is talk of nothing else in all the schools."

In the opinion of the Learned of Zabîd, the colour green used by the Obeydites was almost sacrilegious ; that colour being proper only to the Prophet's family from which they falsely claimed descent.

As the reward of his success on that occasion Abu Dad was at last admitted to the garden and shown the kind of grave which was the prince's house.

" Art thou then the dweller underground, of whom I hear men speaking in the taverns ? " cried the jester. " And didst thou dig this hole thyself with thine own hands ? Praise be to Allah who has let me see such wonders ! "

" Thou also hast done wonders, O my dear ; and, by the Prophet, I am grateful to thee," answered Saïd.

" In sh'Allah, I will do still better. Only wait," said Abu Dad. " I will reduce their intellects to such a state that they see hosts surrounding them. By Allah, I will put them all to flight, unaided ! "

He might, indeed, have done as he declared, for he was highly gifted, had the subjects of his art been quite inactive. But the Government had spies abroad, and Abu Dad soon came to know that he was being shadowed. The recurrence of a certain face of evil aspect in his neighbourhood, go where he would, assured him of the fact. He then resolved to lead his follower a dance.

But, as it chanced, the man in question was no common spy ; he was a sufferer intent on vengeance—the same person who had been ducked in nameless filth one night and forced to swear a false allegiance. Mingling in all companies, with ears intent to catch a hint which might enable him to find the culprits, he had heard men say that they had in their midst a mighty joker, who could be no other than the famous Abu Dad whose antics had convulsed the city in old

days. By dint of asking what this Abu Dad was like, he fixed suspicion on a new arrival in a certain quarter who had already earned renown for reckless drollery. He might have been thrown off the scent had Abu Dad seemed ignorant of his pursuit or, noting it, inquired the reason in a natural way. But when the joker evidently played a game with him, suspicion leapt to absolute conviction. He watched the house continually.

Abu Dad, to pay him out, set on his wife to tempt the man with tales of how she hated him (the jester) and promises that, if he came into the house and hid, she would induce her husband to tell all about the Squinter and his whereabouts. The spy, an easy prey, was smuggled in and hidden in an empty pitcher used for storing water. Abu Dad came in. In answer to his wife's inquiry he declared that the son of Najâh had not left Dahlak, and that all the jokes which had disturbed Zabîd were the work of a religious person named Saksâk, who had received the same by revelation in a state of trance. He then took up a sack of flour and poured its contents down into the monstrous jar ; next pouring glue out of a caldron warmed in readiness. Then, putting on an earthen lid to close the jar, he called two men who waited in the court, commanding them to take the pitcher to the neighbouring market and there sell its contents to the highest bidder. They had hardly reached the street before the jar rolled over, and its occupant escaped ; but in so strange a plight that men fled from him shouting, thinking they beheld a devil ; children yelled and women fainted. Abu Dad and his assistants strove to follow ; but were soon outdistanced. For long they heard the great commotion which his going raised.

That night the jester moved his dwelling to another quarter, where he no longer had to look about him when he walked abroad.

One morning he was summoned to the garden, where the prince lay hid. The secret had remained so long inviolate that Kheyr-ud-dîn had come to think it quite impenetrable. He closed the door behind them as they entered, but did not shoot the bolt. Sitting in the shadow of the wall, the jester learnt that the conspirators now numbered sixty men, not counting their three selves.

"They will suffice, with Allah's help," said Saïd hopefully. "We only wait for the appointed hour."

"I offer twelve more devotees, and cunning rascals, men who think when acting," put in Abu Dad.

"Our Lord reward thee. Deign to state the name of each, and where he may be found," said Kheyr-ud-dîn.

The mention of two names led naturally to the story of the pitcher and the spy, which Abu Dad retailed with gusto, charmed with the hearty laughter it evoked.

"There is another matter," said the prince at length. "My aunt, the Lady Alia, who dwells at Sanaa, desires that we shall send an emissary to observe events and forward information—an educated man, a man of judgment. Wilt thou go?"

"To hear is to obey," replied the jester ruefully. "But I shall need a trusty messenger."

The prince was going to reply when a thud and a half-stifled exclamation close at hand made all three jump. A man, advancing stealthily towards them through the clump of plantains, had fallen into Saïd's hiding-hole.

"It is the spy of whom I spoke to thee—the very same. Give him to me. I will put fear upon him," pleaded Abu Dad.

But Kheyr-ud-dîn and Saïd had bounded forward. The man, emerging from the hole, perceived that he could not escape them. He turned upon them like a

hunted cat. He had a dagger in his hand, and struck out wildly. Kheyr-ud-dîn fell forward suddenly and dragged his feet from under him ; and Saïd, kneeling on his belly, slowly strangled him. For a while there was a horrid gasping, and then all was still.

“ There is neither power nor might save in Allah the High, the Tremendous ! ” moaned the jester, feeling deadly sick. “ I did not wish him dead. He was my laughing-stock.”

“ Allah have mercy on him,” said the prince. “ He had to die since he had heard our secret. To-morrow, O my dear, thou wilt depart for Sanaa. I have written for Jeyyâsh to come now all is ready.”

“ To hear is to obey,” said Abu Dad in lamentable tones. His spirit mourned for that unlucky spy as for a brother.



## X

FROM his childhood up the sight of bloodshed had affected Abu Dad with nausea. But in old days the sickness had passed quickly from him ; within an hour he had been able to deride his weakness. Now the sense of horror kept recurring to him. In Hud the Merchant, silent and morose, squatting immersed in thought upon his camel, one of a long train which strode with clanging bells across Tehâmah, on the road to Sanaa, none would have recognized the greatest jester of the age. When the procession halted at the hours of prayer he was remarked for his absorption in the duties of religion, and in the night his voice was heard reciting the praises of the Prophet or the mystic names of God. A wave of heartfelt piety engulfed him ; and in his self-abasement he composed a poem wherein he likened all mankind to beads upon a chaplet, whereof the string is Allah's mercy, so unbreakable. Yet never had he felt such longing for mere human friendship, the love of those whom he had known in youth. Thus he journeyed on across the broiling plain and through the rocky mountain gorges, oppressed with feelings of old age and loneliness.

At length one afternoon the precipices fell away ; the travellers beheld the fertile tableland of Sanaa—a chessboard of brown tillage and green crops, with trees and villages and high-banked ditches full of waving reeds. The road became well marked. The camel-men set up a joyful song ; the heart of Abu Dad

resumed its wonted beat. They reached the city just as the muezzin's chant began to float forth from the minarets upon the twilight, just half an hour before the closing of the gates.

Abu Dad went with the others to the public inn—a courtyard full of bales and beasts of burden around which rose three tiers of galleries leading to rooms which could be hired by travellers. Having chosen one of these, which opened on the topmost gallery, he sent a servant of the place to purchase candles, ink, and a small roll of parchment. When these were brought to him, he wrote a letter with great care, sealed and addressed it to the Lady Alia, the guarded consort of the honourable Caïd Abdullah whom might God preserve in health and honour. The boy who brought the things had squatted down to watch him while he wrote. Abu Dad, remarking his absorption, asked: "Canst read and write?"

"No, to my sorrow, O my master."

"If thou desirest I will teach thee while I sojourn here."

"Blessed be thy tongue that speaks it!" cried the lad enraptured. "I am thy slave from henceforth. Do but give command."

"I have an errand for thee even now. Go, take this letter to the palace of the Caïd Abdullah. It is for his lady, who would see my merchandise. Await the answer. She is sure to send one."

"On my head be it." The boy received the letter, kissed it, laid it to his forehead and was gone like the wind. He returned within an hour to say that the great lady would receive the merchant at her levée on the morrow. Abu Dad who, in his absence, had prepared two pens, then gave the messenger his first instruction in the art of writing. That done, he extinguished the candles and went out to the railing of the gallery to watch the stars.

The air struck chill on one accustomed to the lowland climate, and on the breeze was borne the call of soldiers on their rounds, with bark of dogs. In Zabîd at that late hour the only sounds of human life would be the chant of devotees in the great mosques, or that of wakeful lovers improvising to the lute. At setting out his lord's success had seemed assured, immediate ; it now appeared remote and problematical, nothing that he could do would hasten it ; so he might take his ease.

His visit to the Lady Alia next morning confirmed him in this apathetic view. The house in which she dwelt was one of those tall towers, with arrow-slits instead of windows which rose above the houses of the poorer citizens ; memorials of the old days of tribal feuds before the overwhelming power of the Suleyhi had imposed its peace upon the mountains and the town. He presented himself, as directed, at a little postern, appearing as a merchant with a tray of goods, covered with a silken cloth, upon his head ; and was at once admitted to an audience of the lady, who reclined on a divan in a room whose stone walls were concealed by tapestry, its stone floor softened to the tread by deep-piled rugs. Her lips and cheeks were painted and her eyes seemed preternaturally bright, enhanced by kohl. The jester in his soul compared them to two wells reflecting heaven's radiance in a blighted land ; for they alone of all her person were unmarred by age. She turned them on him at his entrance, and then veiled them. He squatted down before her, and removed the cover from his tray. The slave-girl, who had let him in, emitted cries of admiration. Her mistress told her to be gone immediately.

"Thy news?" she questioned when they were alone.

"The dweller underground comes forth on to the surface of the earth."

“ Who is this dweller underground ? ” she asked impatiently.

Thereupon Abu Dad, who was an expert story-teller, narrated Saïd’s journey to Zabîd and his adventures there, without once mentioning the prince’s name. When all was told, he said : “ My lord has now a band of seventy devoted men, all pledged to serve him to the death. Astrologers declare that in a month the stars are favourable to his undertaking. He has written for his twin in splendour and eclipse to come and join him.”

“ A month ! May God prevent it ! ” screamed the lady. “ The son of my brother must be raving mad. At least a year of preparation is required. The country is at peace ; the troops are all at hand to quell a rising. Inhabiting a hole without a woman near him, his mind may well have grown deranged, the poor one ! Say, did he bring a wife with him from Dahlak, or has he wedded any woman of Zabîd ? ”

“ He has been chaste as one upon the pilgrimage.”

“ Merciful Allah ! Then no wonder he is mad. Women, even the most foolish of them, bring good counsel ; they keep a man’s two feet upon the earth, preventing fancies. The Suleyhi have in that respect a great advantage ; for the noblest women of the age are in their counsels. One would call the Lady Asma, wife of Ali, the wisest of her sex as she is certainly the proudest, were it not that the companion of her son Mukarram, the Lady Sayyidah, is wiser still, and charms all comers by her beauty, making friends of foes. God knows I hate the man who slew my brother treacherously ; and yet I swear to thee that I respect and love those ladies. The world of women is a world apart, thou knowest ; and in the world of women Sayyidah is rightful queen, and Asma her elect companion. With such women to correct them, the plans of the Suleyhi are all reasonable, unlike the schemes of that demented boy.”

"By Allah, I must tell him to dismiss his men and take to women," chuckled Abu Dad.

"Be silent, evil joker!" said the lady, smiling. "Now begone! Return at the same hour to-morrow. I will ascertain the disposition of the Abyssinian troops, that thou mayest have some matter to report to our mad lord."

She reached her hand for him to kiss, and he retired obediently, leaving a jewel on the ground before her. Having locked up the remaining trinkets in his private chamber at the inn, he took refreshment in the lower gallery, to the music of the grunts and groans of tethered camels, and then went forth to view the wonders of the town. Having visited the mosques and cemeteries, and surveyed the citadel from many points of view, he was returning through the narrow streets, when the approach of a fine company of horsemen made him draw aside into an archway. Other wayfarers had taken the same refuge. The cavaliers were men in armour, bearing lances decked with small green flags which fluttered in the breeze. They sang as they came on—a curious chant, of which the words were insults. Abu Dad plucked the hanging sleeve of one who stood beside him, asking to know the meaning of the song.

"They come from tilting," was the answer; "and their song is in derision of the heir apparent, Al Mukarram Ahmad, for his laziness. He is the strongest of them all, the greatest hero, yet to-day, instead of joining in their warlike sports, they say he has been snaring little birds. They say his wife, the Lady Sayidah, should wear his armour, and he assume her veils and petticoats."

"Ma sh'Allah!" exclaimed Abu Dad. "And do they dare thus publicly to satirize the heir apparent?"

"Our darling Al Mukarram is good-natured and so very lazy that he cares not what they say or sing

concerning him," rejoined the townsman with a laugh. "By Allah, if the song be well composed, it is likely that he will reward it with a gift."

"A wondrous country, by my life!" said Abu Dad. "In all my travels I have seen none like it."

Returning to the inn at sunset, he took supper in the public room and remained there, listening to the gossip, until late at night. On going to his room at length, he found the serving-lad before the threshold fast asleep. He roused him gently.

"Is it thou, O lord of kindness?" asked the boy, as he got up and rubbed his eyes. "I came up for my lesson, but thou wast not here."

"Come in the morning. Thou art weary now. Wake me at sunrise. Thou shalt have thy lesson then. Bring fire that I may light my candles. May thy night be happy! To-morrow I shall send thee to Zabîd, in sh'Allah."

"Thou comest from Zabîd, O master of benevolence? My father and my mother both were from Tehâmah. I think that all men from Zabîd are kind and learned. Fain would I go to study in those famous schools."

"To-morrow I will send thee on an errand to a man of learning. Perform that errand faithfully, and thou shalt have thy will."

"By Allah, I will give my life a ransom for thee."

On the morrow, having visited the Lady Alia, and received from her the promised information, Abu Dad indited his report, addressing it, as Saïd had directed, to the care of the Sheykh Abdul Halîm. The tidings which he had to send were far from favourable. Indeed so desperate did the adventure seem, that, having written his report, he was debating whether it would not be best to burn it and write instead that the whole cause was hopeless, when his pupil came to tell him that a great one of the soldiers was below,

inquiring for the merchant Hud, a new arrival from Zabîd. This great one proved to be the husband of the Lady Alia, the Caïd Abdullah, an old friend of Abu Dad. He came, he said aloud, to see the latter's merchandise, which, he had heard, included curiosities of price. But when they were alone, he changed his tone completely, falling upon the jester's neck, and crying :

"Hail, O Abu Dad ! May God preserve thee ! I have just come from my lady, who has told me what she said to thee this morning. I think it likely, after what she told thee, that thou wilt write to our beloved of discouragement. Do not so, I beseech thee ; there is ground for hope. Swear not to speak of what I now reveal to thee ! A great blow has been struck at the Obeydite influence. The Hashemites have taken Mecca, and expelled the heretics from the Hejjâz. Ali es-Suleyhi and his counsellors are much perturbed. They still hope that the news may be untrue or much exaggerated. But I have spoken with the messenger who brought the tidings, and he assures me that there is no room for doubt. Say nothing of all this in writing to our dear one. Write only : great events may happen shortly. Above all, speak not of it to my lady, who is over-talkative. . . . Suppose that the Suleyhi should wage distant war with all his soldiery, a handful of resolute men might rob him of Tehâmah and the forts which guard the passes. . . . I will keep thee well informed from time to time. Or, better : art thou not a famous joker, a known composer of facetious verse ? I will introduce thee to the Prince Mukarram, who is eager for the company of such as thee—'Hud the Merchant, a great jester, from the coast of Africa.' It shall be done. He will reward me for presenting to him such a pearl. Now, in thy grace, I must depart. My duties call me."

The jester added to his first report these words :

"I am informed that changes, due to great events, will take place shortly."

His pupil, carrying the letter, was already far from Sanaa when Abu Dad went down to sup that evening in the crowded guest-room.



## XI

ON receiving Saïd's letter Prince Jeyyâsh gave praise to Allah, and then took counsel with the Sheykh Rashîd, his former tutor, by whose advice he kept the nature of the tidings secret, and abstained from demonstrations of excitement or delight. Within a week a ship was bought and manned with trusty servants, and most of the remaining treasure of the royal house, both coin and jewellery, was put on board in bales like merchandise. Jeyyâsh and the tutor, both attired as learned clerks—a dress not inconsistent with the avocations of a merchant—went on board. The breeze was favourable. They sped across the purple water towards Hodeydah; their sole discomfort in the voyage being that, at every change of tack, the pieces tumbled off the chessboard on the deck between them, which was neglected only at the hours of prayer. The women in the cabin wailed continually.

At Hodeydah they hired camels and proceeded calmly to Zabîd, replying to all questioners that they were merchants, and reverent observers of God's works in search of knowledge. They met with the respect attending quiet men who pay their bills with proper scrutiny and give a trifle to the poor.

At first sight of the palm-groves of Zabîd, Jeyyâsh, profoundly moved, alighted from his camel and spent an hour in prayer and meditation. Then the caravan resumed its way; the bells around each camel's neck renewed their music of the road. They entered the

city at the 'asr,\* and repaired to the inn of Abu Shukûr, as Saïd in his letter had directed. Here they hired two rooms, one for their women, and another for their precious bales which they arranged so as to leave room for men to sleep upon the floor between them. This done, they went to an adjacent public bath where, having purged their bodies of the filth of travel, they took refreshment under an arcade beside the street, feasting their eyes on the remembered sights and sounds.

"It would not much surprise me," said Jeyyâsh, "to see my father and his friends ride by on their return from jousting. And yet how all is changed for me and mine! Praise be to God who guards the generality of men from sharing the misfortunes which afflict the few!"

"Praise be to Allah!" his companion answered. "There goes the turban of a learned man of my acquaintance. Our Lord extend thy shadow, O Mansûr, O upright jurist—thou who didst steal my set of verses in the competition when we both were boys. . . . And here—look!—comes that very seller of boiled eggs and bread who used to sit before the palace-gate. His beard is grizzled now. Allah is greatest!"

They sat thus happily until the crying of the sunset-prayer, when they went into a mosque hard by, where there were many worshippers. Returning in the gloaming to the inn, they saw two figures, muffled beyond recognition, waiting in the gallery before their private room. Jeyyâsh sprang forward with a cry: "My brother!" At the same moment Sheykh Rashîd was seized by Kheyr-ud-dîn, who led him to the far end of the gallery.

"Leave them alone together," said the showman sagely. "Thou, O my lord, and I have no existence till their rapture is established."

\* The hour of prayer midway between noon and sunset.

It was not long before the princes came to them, and Saïd reverently kissed his tutor's hand.

"Where is Abu Dad?" inquired Jeyyâsh, remembering.

"Our king of jesters is at Sanaa at this moment, the boon companion of the Prince Mukarram, praise to Allah! A messenger from him arrived this very day. He is in honour at the court of the Suleyhi, and all that happens there is known to him and so to us. He serves us well. He played tricks in the city here which so perplexed the Government that they still pursue the phantom of conspiracy while the reality is thriving at their very gate. The news he sends is good. The Hashemites have taken Mecca; that thou knowest. Well, the false Khalîfah has commanded Ali es-Suleyhi to march with all his forces and restore his heresy. In a month the armies will be moving northward. Then we strike."

"Better to wait until the armies are far distant. A month hence they will still be near," Jeyyâsh suggested.

"So much the better!" answered Saïd gaily. "At the appointed hour we strike upon the neck of the usurper. I would not have him pass beyond my reach."

"Let the king be, O my dear lord!" said Kheyr-ud-dîn. "He is as one inspired, and he sets fire to others. Our little band of seventy, with him for leader, would rush with glee to the assault of Sanaa."

"Allahu Akbar!" said Jeyyâsh resignedly, the pious exclamation being echoed by the other three. "What can I do to help?" he asked after a space of silence.

At the question Saïd exchanged a glance with Kheyr-ud-dîn. He chuckled:

"There is one thing, O beloved, which we cannot manage. Abdul Halîm, the great historian, is our

well-wisher, but exceeding troublesome. He asks to see me every day; he bullies us. He has embarked upon a world-wide project of intrigue, intended to persuade all Muslims to embrace our cause. And so it might, perhaps—in fifty years. He urges us to make alliances and get together monstrous sums of money, advancing slowly and with vast precautions. Of course he has no knowledge of our real proceedings. Now I am weary of his conversation, Allah knows. Take thou my place. Amuse him with inventions of thy poet's brain. Let him know that thou hast brought us treasure: that will please him. He has conceived a high opinion of our family which thou, its learned man, wilt not belie."

"To hear is to obey," replied Jeyyâsh facetiously.

Saïd and Kheyr-ud-dîn withdrew about the third hour of the night. The former was no longer living in the garden by the river-bank, but he kept the secret of his present lodging even from his brother, and preserved the designation of the dweller underground.

The days which followed were most pleasant to Jeyyâsh. Having handed over all the treasure brought from Dahlak to Saïd, or rather Kheyr-ud-dîn, who was the manager of the conspiracy, he sent his servant round the markets to inquire what dwellings were for hire. He found one which exactly suited him, small yet with all the pleasures of a palace, having a garden court of perfect privacy where scented shrubs grew round a basin filled with water from the river. Here he installed himself with his beloved Malak, the companion of his leisure; while Sheykh Rashîd and his old wife found lodging near at hand. Each day he went to one or other of the college mosques and joined in the discussions of the Learned; each afternoon he called upon the great historian, and in the gloaming visited his father's tomb and other monuments

connected with his family. He loved the very kennels of his native town.

It did not take him long to discover that his identity was known to many persons in Zabîd. A smile, a knowing look, an inclination of the head, apprised him of the fact ; and, seeing that all those who recognized him seemed to wish him well, he augured favourably of his brother's fortunes. It vexed him, on the other hand, to hear from Saïd himself that the Sheykh Salâmah had returned and was among his counsellors. Without much solid ground for his dislike, he loathed the man ; who, though technically of the Learned in religion, was, he discovered, seldom seen among the doctors of Zabîd. When Jeyyâsh inquired of the historian the reason of this absence, the old man answered :

“ Thy lips question, O my son ; but Allah knows thy soul has full assurance. Salâmah bears the outward semblance of a pious man, and he has learning which he uses as a cloak for occupations which, if lawful, are, to say the least, unusual. It is common knowledge that he trades in girls of beauty, training them in his household in a kind of school ; and it is also rumoured that he deals in poison. Thy brother has a love for him, and thinks him faithful. Well, the devil, who would drive a man to his destruction, is, in a manner, faithful to that man. Adherence and trustworthiness are different things. Now, I have known Salâmah from his youth ; for three years he was my pupil in the class of exegetics. I do not hate him ; I have known him do good deeds. But I have had reason to deplore his influence on men of action. I have essayed to warn thy brother, but he pays no heed, and Kheyr-ud-dîn is quite enraptured with Salâmah.”

Jeyyâsh and the old scholar had struck up a friendship. Abdul Halîm often lamented that this learned prince, this poet known already far and wide,

was not the claimant to the throne of Yaman. When a young student of poetry—the same who had attended Saïd and Abu Dad upon the road from Aden, and had led them to his uncle's dwelling in Ta'izz—fell down and kissed the ground between Jeyyâsh's feet, acclaiming him the greatest poet of the age, Abdul Halîm sighed deeply, and explained :

“ He is a dreamer. Only think : that young man joined thy brother's partisans, all for the love of thee whom he has never seen. He journeyed with thy brother on the road from Aden, but did not recognize him at that time. When he discovered who had been his black companion, he sought him in Zabîd and swore allegiance with enthusiasm, reciting at the same time certain of thy poems which he has by heart. All his relatives are partisans of the Suleyhi. The others—common fellows such as Kheyr-ud-dîn—laugh at him, being unable to appreciate so fine a spirit. They call him mad, and so he is to serve thy brother and not thee. . . .” He sighed again. “ When I speak among the Learned, using all my efforts to persuade them that our cause is holy, they reply : ‘ Saïd is ambitious. He is nearly if not quite as bad as the Suleyhi. Why should the quiet people be disturbed in order to replace one malefactor by another ? We cannot put an end to strife upon the earth, but we can, please God, prevent the crime of crimes, which is the victimizing of the truly faithful in the strife of hypocrites.’ Now, if thou wert the claimant they would reason otherwise, for thou art one of us. I hear men praise thee.” He paused a moment, hesitating ; then continued : “ Would it not be possible—I am loath to say it ; God forgive me !—would it not be possible for thee to supplant thy honoured brother by some stratagem ? ”

Jeyyâsh, regarding the anxious, altogether honest face of that most innocent of men, was filled with laughter. He seized the hand of the historian and

murmured: "Hush, O thoughtless speaker! Be such suggestions far from both of us. I love my brother."

"The thoughts of men are uncontrollable," the old man groaned. "I view things too much in the light of history. The thing has happened many times. The Lord forgive me!"

The king meanwhile was working somewhere indefatigably. His spirit moved the city, and the rumour of his presence was in all men's mouths. Yet few could truly say that they had seen him, and of those few not more than ten could boast that they had seen him twice. For three days in succession he visited Jeyyâsh, appearing under various disguises, then for a week he vanished, then he came again. Sometimes his news was good and sometimes evil, yet he never seemed downcast or doubtful of success.

One day it was: "We hear from Sanaa that the army gathered for the war with Mecca numbers twenty thousand men. The garrisons will be quite empty. Abu Dad imagines, foolish man, that our desire is but to seize Zabîd; whereas our thoughts are all of killing Ali es-Suleyhi—aye, though his armies numbered fifty thousand."

On another day he told his brother that the governor of Zabîd had caused search to be made from house to house for weapons. "And all the arms which we had gathered patiently and distributed among our people have been seized. No matter; a mere stick or stone will kill a man if handled skilfully. God will provide the weapons in our lucky hour."

And then he disappeared for several days. The Sheykh Rashîd imagined that he saw him once at prayers in the great mosque; and Malak, going shopping with her maid, swore that she recognized his voice in that of a poor holy man who asked for alms. There were conflicting rumours everywhere. Conspiracy was

in the air. The slaves of power were vigilant. Wherever two or three men spoke together with an air of secrecy, another man was certain to draw near. Some persons were arrested arbitrarily and beaten, although no disturbance had occurred.

Jeyyâsh, extremely anxious for his brother's safety, began to harbour fears upon his own account.

Malak came in one noonday, sadly agitated. She and her slave, when walking in the markets, had heard men say that Saïd the Squinter was a prisoner. It was certain that the rulers would not spare his life. Jeyyâsh was rushing out to make inquiries when, on the threshold of his house, appeared a pilgrim, and the voice of Saïd cried: "Peace upon thee!" He drew the visitor into the house and barred the door, exclaiming: "Praise be to Allah, thou art not a prisoner!"

"Praise be to Allah!" answered Saïd, laughing. "A person most unlike me in appearance save that he squints—a merchant from Bahreyn—has been incarcerated by the slaves of power. It was a notion of the Sheykh Salâmah to denounce some other squinter, since it was imperative that they should capture some one who resembled me to stop their search for a few hours. To-night we raise the standard. We can wait no more. One of our party has been missing for three days, and now I learn that he has fled to Sanaa. That means that we must lose no time. Give my farewells to Malak. Embrace me, O my dear, and pray for us."

"By Allah, I go with you and I share your fate. I leave thee not henceforward," said Jeyyâsh with vehemence.



## XII

FROM the loophole, closed when necessary with a wooden shutter, which served as window to his chamber high up in the Tower of Sanaa, Abu Dad gazed night after night on many twinkling points to northward beyond the fringes of the fertile plain. These marked the great encampment of the army which Ali es-Suleyhi was to lead against the men of Mecca. After leaving the gay circle of the heir apparent of which he was esteemed the brightest ornament, the jester sat each night beside the loophole, wrapt in prayer and meditation, gazing ever at those distant flames upon the mountain slopes. He deemed himself the most unfortunate of men, though highly favoured. Al Mukarram, captivated by his wit, rained gifts upon him. The servants of the palace paid him reverence; the great ones of the court besought his friendship. His quips and oddities convulsed the town. And yet he was at heart profoundly miserable.

In the first place, craving female company, especially of one who knew him in his younger days, he had sent a message by the caravan to Umm Selîm, the widow of Ta'izz, entreating her to come and join him; only to learn some three weeks later that his object of desire was married to a common tribesman—a rude Bedawi, but young. That was the point which rankled: he was young. Then when Mukarram, in reward for a facetious poem on this subject, bestowed on him a sum with which to buy a slave-girl, he had bought a poor

emaciated creature and her child whose looks appealed to him. The mother, who had traces of great beauty, died the following day, and he was left with a small child dependent on him. The woman, ere she died, had told her story. She was the daughter of a sultan of the southern Arabs, and had been snatched from her relations lately in a tribal war. Her death and the child's grief depressed him sorely ; and he had paid a heavy price for them.

In the second place, his conscience pricked him day and night because of the ungrateful part that he was forced to play. Mukarram was the living soul of generosity, yet Abu Dad was bound in honour to betray him. He bemoaned his fate. The leaders of the host from all the highlands came into Sanaa from the camp each day. The city wore an air of festival, though townfolk murmured of the damage done to crops and herds, and other outrages committed by the savage clans who, when on foray, pillaged as of right. The quiet people much preferred the Abyssinian mercenaries to whose behaviour they were used in time of peace. In this they were in sympathy with the people of Zabîd and of the lowlands generally rather than with their rulers, themselves mountain Arabs, who had no liking for the servile troops. All this the jester gathered in his walks abroad, and from the talk of Caïd Abdullah and his lady, to whom he paid his duty every morning. No murmurs reached the Prince Mukarram's joyous circle.

The prince was to remain as regent of the kingdom. Many reproached him for accepting the appointment, and suffering his father, an old man, to go to war.

" But my father—may the Lord preserve him !—loves the dust of battle ; I detest it," he remarked to Abu Dad on one occasion when the Cadi, an old friend, had spoken to him in this strain. " A war which was for true religion, or to avenge our house's honour on

some dire affront, would rouse my spirit. But these wars for different dynasties are foolish. May Allah put an end to them for ever, and leave me to my hunting and the joys of love."

He yawned and stretched his splendid limbs upon the sofa. His sentiment seemed just to Abu Dad, who in their intercourse had come to love the easy prince. The carouses, when Mukarram drank much wine, disgusted him, but the invariable kindness and good temper of the prince, even when drunk, had won his deep affection. It shamed him, as he sat alone at night, to remember that he was a spy upon this noble benefactor. But then the vision of Najâh, his former patron, treacherously murdered by the father of this same Mukarram ; of the sons of Najâh in poverty and exile, overwhelmed him. How was man to judge ? Why were good and evil so inextricably mingled in the world ? He asked the Lord of heaven and earth for true direction.

"It is not really I who am the regent ; it is Sayyidah," the prince informed him, as they all returned from viewing the departure of the army on the first stage of its journey to the noble sanctuary. He nodded forward towards a point upon the road, which they were following through fields and orchards, where the procession of the Lady Sayyidah could be discerned amid a cloud of dust. Abu Dad, upon a mule, had kept behind the men of note on horseback till ordered by the prince himself to ride beside him. "There is none like her upon earth. She will transact all business with my mother's help."

It grieved the jester thus to hear his benefactor speak lightly of a state of things which all the world deplored. The Lady Sayyidah was the most gifted woman of her day, and very beautiful. But she valued her intelligence above her beauty, and was by no means satisfied with merely amorous conquests.

She aspired to sovereign power, and did her best to rouse her lazy husband to delight in war that he might add more territory to her kingdom. He refused. It was said that she had wept for days on that refusal, consoled by her adoring mother-in-law, the Lady Asma, who loved Mukarram with a passion which partook of anger and contempt. The prince declared that he was glad to be relieved of all the cares of state, and people said that Sayyidah at first imagined, from his indolence, that he possessed no strength of character ; but he had undeceived her, reading her a lesson she was never likely to forget.

All this which Abu Dad had learnt from common gossip illumined chance remarks the prince let fall concerning her.

They were in the streets of Sanaa, watched from roofs and windows, Abu Dad still riding at Mukarram's side, when some one grasped the jester's stirrup and then touched his arm. It was his messenger, the student of handwriting, dusty to the eyes. He laid two fingers to his lips in sign of news. A narrowing of the way obliged the jester then to fall behind the prince. He turned his mule aside into an archway.

"One of the band thou knowest has turned traitor, and is now in Sanaa," breathed the messenger beside him. "I strove to overtake him, running, but he had the start of me. When I arrived an hour ago I heard that he had gained the ear of the chief steward. Return not to the castle, I advise thee. Flee at once!"

"No, by Allah! That would but confirm this rascal's story. Besides, I must return to fetch my little girl."

"Our Lord preserve thee!" cried the boy despairingly. "I sleep to-night down in the ditch below the castle-wall. Until the dawn to-morrow I await thee there."

"Our Lord reward thee!"

Abu Dad turned back his mule out of the archway. Kicking with both heels and thwacking with his staff, he did his best to overtake the cavalcade. But when he reached the castle-yard Mukarram had already entered his own private rooms. He craved immediate audience ; he was told to wait. Going to his chamber he wrote upon a strip of parchment verses with this meaning :

“ My enemy is with the prince’s lady. I seek refuge in Allah and the protection of the prince.”

This he handed to a servant with entreaties that he would place it in Mukarram’s hand without delay.

He sat and waited. He saw in mind the landscapes of Zabīd and Dahlak, the various widows he had left about the world, and then, with anguish, the small girl Yasminah, of whom he was the sole protector. He had placed her in the charge of an old servant of the court. What would become of her when he was dead ?

“ By the tomb of the Prophet, by the hope of my salvation,” he exclaimed within himself with violence, “ I swear to give that child her freedom and restore her to her people if Allah spares my life beyond to-morrow.”

A servant called him to the presence of the Lady Sayyidah. Along a corridor and down a marble stairway he was led through doors which opened without knocking to a curtain which was drawn aside at his approach. He stood in a room whose walls were clothed in needlework of which the pattern represented texts of Scripture. Chains of lamps depending from the ceiling shed a gentle glow. The Lady Sayyidah reclined upon a dais before him. At first he thought he was alone with her, but presently he grew aware of two tall negroes, one on either hand, standing so still that they seemed graven images. Only the rolling of their eyes suggested life.

“ O Yasminah, little sugar-plum ! ” he murmured

in his soul, "if I escape alive from this accursed place, I will restore thee to thy people with a handsome dowry."

Frightened though he was to death, he could not but admire the lady's face and posture. Never before had he enjoyed so near a view of her. Her complexion was extremely fair, almost as fair as that of northern maidens who occasionally found their way into the market of Zabîd. Her head-veil was of silken gauze richly embroidered, her robe of amethystine silk adorned with pearls. She reclined before him on a bed of cushions, raised upon one elbow. She was looking at the ground. At last she spoke :

"O thou who callest thyself Hud the Merchant, thou art in truth no other than the Sheykh Muhammad surnamed Abu Dad, the boon companion and hired jester of Najâh the Abyssinian gone to Allah's mercy. Thou hast been denounced to us as in confederacy with the son of Najâh to overthrow our sovereignty in Yaman. Thou wast with Saïd the Squinter and Jeyyâsh in Dahlak. Inform me, I beseech thee, of their characters."

Abu Dad cleared his throat, then answered huskily :

"My lord Saïd is a man of passion and great energy. He is a zealot, and his zeal inspires his followers. In peace and friendship he is like an angel from the realm of bliss ; in war a very fiend, implacable and ruthless."

"Known. And his brother ? "

"My lord Jeyyâsh resembles one of the Companions of the Prophet (may God bless and keep him). He is a servant of the Lord, a slave of conscience ; save only when in love ; then all his wits forsake him ; but that has happened seldom in his life. He is revered by all the Learned for his erudition, and by the common people for his justice and his charity."

"We have no quarrel with Jeyyâsh," the lady murmured. "But is it true, as the informer swears

it is, that both these Abyssinians are at present in Zabîd ? ”

“ True, O my lady.”

“ What does their claim amount to ? Would the Squinter be content to rule the district of Zabîd under our sovereignty.”

“ His aim is to avenge his father’s death.”

“ By killing our lord Ali ? Would that satisfy him, think you—that and the Government of Zabîd ? Would he abstain from war against my lord Mukarram and admit his suzerainty ? ”

“ By Allah, that I know not, O my lady.”

“ Thou hast taught me something, and for that I thank thee. On the other hand, thou art a spy and, if I let thee go, wilt carry information to our enemies. I pray the Lord, have mercy on thee. O Meymûn, spread a covering ; and thou, Sawwâb, smite through his bulging neck.”

The jester fell upon his face and shrieked for mercy, while the eunuchs spread some sacking over the fine carpet, and one of them, the nearest, drew his scimitar. His outcry winning no response, he summoned up his manhood and begged for leave to pray two rekaas \* ere he died. This was granted ; and he had just assumed the attitude of prayer when the curtain at the entrance to the room was drawn aside and Al Mukarram entered, slouching as his manner was. At sight of what was going forward he became erect.

“ What means all this ? ” he questioned in a voice of thunder.

“ The execution of a traitor, O my soul, as well thou knowest,” said his lady with affected carelessness.

“ Sawwâb, put up thy sword ! Meymûn, conduct this person to his chamber ! Merciful Allah ! Am I

\* Rekaa is the bowing which precedes the two prostrations in the Muslim prayer. Here, and generally, used for the whole act of worship.

not the ruler of this land? Spy or merchant, this believer is my guest and in my power. By the honour of the Arabs he shall go forth scathless! Where is the rogue who testified against him?"

"He goes to-morrow, under escort, to the army, to repeat his testimony in thy father's hearing."

"Then this man shall go with him under escort. They will hardly overtake the king before Al Mahjam. If Saïd the Squinter, as that rascal says, rebels to-morrow or the next day, the whole business will be over before then."

"To hear is to obey," agreed the lady sullenly.

Abu Dad, bewildered and half-dead from fright, had scarce returned to his own chamber ere Mukarram joined him. Moved past all thought of prudence by his gratitude, the jester fell upon his knees and had begun to make a full confession; but the prince forbade him, saying:

"What is that to me? I have had joy of thy companionship. What matter if thou didst send tidings to the Squinter? Thou reportedst only what was known to thee. Now listen. I shall give the escort orders to release thee at the end of one day's journey. Then hasten to Zabïd and tell the Squinter something of importance this time. My father has by now had news of the conspiracy. A rider started in the first hour after noon. I request him to detach five thousand men to quell the rising. What chance have Saïd and his rabble against such an army? Advise him, and his worthy brother—whose poetry I much admire—to fly to Dahlak. Say that I sent thee—I, Mukarram Ahmad, son of Ali—with my compliments. And when that errand is performed, return to me, if so it please thee. Thou art ever welcome."

So it chanced that Abu Dad was still alive next morning. The student of handwriting praised God for it as they left the town. Mounted on his mule



with the little girl Yasminah up before him, and his faithful pupil walking at his side, escorted by a troop of Arab horsemen, he travelled northward towards Al Mahjam on the road to Mecca. At the evening halt the leader of the party told him: "I have no further charge concerning thee. South, East or West, all roads are open to thee." His pupil having seen him safe, returned towards Sanaa.

The jester, in whose mind anxiety for Saïd's project had been growing in proportion as the terrors of his last few hours at Sanaa faded in his mind, set out after a short rest and travelled all that night, the little girl asleep between his arms. When Saïd was warned, he would restore her to her people and so discharge the debt to God which weighed upon his mind. Late on the second night he reached Zabîd; yet many lights were moving on the walls, and shouts both wild and frequent came from thence. Something had happened to alarm the rulers. Out in the palm-groves where he meant to pass the night, were groups of people talking eagerly.

"They bound and gagged the guard at the south gate," a man was crying, "and they hoodwinked them so that they could not tell which way they took. Some say that they are in the city; it is all a joke. Others declare that they have gained possession of the royal palace."

"They have gone towards the mountains," cried another, "their object being to secure the passes."

There was no doubt, in the jester's mind, of whom they spoke.

Then all at once he heard a voice he knew, the voice of the historian, upraised in lamentation. It drew nearer.

"Woe is me! I heard of their rash project all too late. I caused my ass to be prepared and I rode after them, anxious to turn them from their mad design.

They mocked me. That low rabble plucked my beard. One ruffian threw a stone and struck my donkey, causing him to plunge and gallop to my great discomfort. I cited to them all the rules of history. They mocked me, laughing in my beard, and drove me back. The Lord have mercy on us ! All is lost ! ”

The doleful chant, as it drew near, was mingled with the patter of a donkey’s hoofs. The old man was complaining to his running servant.

“ Say, which way did they go ? Thou knowest me : I am Muhammad, surnamed Abu Dad. I also would dissuade them from the undertaking. I bear tidings,” cried the jester.

The donkey-rider stopped and peered amid the darkness.

“ When I left them they were on the middle road, beside Al Karam. They are full of devils. No matter what thy tidings, they will not regard them. They mocked me—me, the founder of their enterprise.”

“ Listen, O sea of learning ! ” said the jester earnestly. “ I charge thee, by thy hope of bliss hereafter, to take care of this young girl, who is both free and noble. Guard her with thy honoured women until my return. The need is urgent. With thy leave I go.”

He placed Yasminah in the arms of the dismayed historian, who could only splutter in his great astonishment ; and then was gone.

### XIII

CLOSE to the tomb of King Najâh, between its green dome and the city wall, there was a little grove of almond trees, where a vendor of cool drinks and sweet-stuff had his trestles in the shade. It was no uncommon thing for men to gather there towards evening, to discuss the news and watch the sunset through the colonnades of palms which stretched beyond. Some six hours before the chance encounter of the great historian with Abu Dad, the concourse at this pleasant spot had been unusually great. Each fresh arrival carried a long palm-stick, which he laid upon a heap already made, before he stretched his length upon the ground, and called for sherbet. The assembly was dispersed in groups of three and four, which kept apart as if each group were unacquainted with the others. Yet the staves were all of equal length and were deposited, as if by prearrangement, near two men who from their bearing seemed of higher rank.

As a rule the sherbet-seller stayed upon the scene till his last customer departed ; but this evening the red rose of sunset bloomed and faded, the blue of twilight darkened into night, and still the owners of the palm-sticks gave no sign of moving. The sherbet-seller packed up his belongings ostentatiously, and calling, "May your night be happy !" was for going off, when a stern voice commanded :

"Wait !"

"How can I wait ?" he answered plaintively.  
"Will not the gates be shut against me in a minute ?"

"Wait till the gates are shut. We have a use for thee."

The owners of the palm-sticks closed around the sherbet-seller, who in that eerie hour supposed them demons and was stupefied. The leader then inquired : "Has every man here present fixed a nail upon his staff ? "

"Aye, Wallahi ! " came from all sides in an eager whisper like the rush of water.

"Then are we as well armed as the bodyguard of the Suleyhi ! " There was stifled laughter. "Let the prisoner be set before me."

The mystified and frightened sherbet-seller was hustled forward till he stood before a shape which seemed to tower amid the darkness of the little grove.

"O father of refreshment, thou perceivest that it is not peace but war. I charge thee, tell me, art thou for us or against us ? "

"For you, by Allah, since my fate has placed me here."

"Then know that I am Saïd the son of King Najâh, whose tomb is yonder, and here beside me is the Prince Jeyyâsh, my brother."

The sherbet-seller fell upon the ground and kissed it, saying : "Praise be to Allah who makes day succeed to night."

"Now we are going round the walls to the south gate, where thou wilt clamour for admission in a plaintive way, offering money to the sentinels if they at first refuse. The moment that the gate is opened, we rush in and bind the guards."

"To hear is to obey."

"Well, you have heard me, all of you. Pick up your weapons and proceed with stealth."

Again there came that eager whisper like the rush of water.

"Behold ! A sign from heaven ! " cried the leader

as they issued from the little grove. He paused that all might see the crescent moon immediately above the tomb of King Najâh, whose dome, in silhouette, was like a fig, stalk upwards. "Praise be to Allah!" came from every throat.

At the south gate the sherbet-seller cried aloud as one benighted:

"O lords of kindness as of bravery, O guardians of the righteous, open, for the love of Allah! Let me in! The plain is full of gloom and sorcery. The dwellers underground—the name of God be round about us!—are abroad, and I am all alone, without a helper. Admit me, I beseech you, ere I die of fright."

After curses from within, a gruff voice questioned: "Who art thou, O tiresome squeaker?"

"By the Lord, I am no other than Rashîd the sherbet-seller, a dweller in the city and well known, benighted by the accident of sleep. Admit me, for the love of Allah! I have gold."

After much grumbling of the guards, there came the noise of great bolts being driven back. The gate was opened. There was a rush in which Rashîd was over-set. When he regained his wits, the soldiers of the guard had all been overpowered, bound hand and foot, and hoodwinked, with a cloth stretched tight from brow to chin and tied behind the head. The evels stole away in silence, turning northward in the shadow of the wall. Rashîd went with them, for a time unnoticed. Then Kheyr-ud-dîn observed his presence and informed him: "Thou art free." He answered: "I am free no longer, nor have I any way but yours. My soul is with you. If it may be, I would know the meaning of your work there at the gate."

"A stratagem, no more! Those men saw us enter, then we closed their eyes and ears. They think a host has gone into the city. They will spread sincere reports to that effect, relieving us of any danger of pursuit."

"In sh'Allah!" There were chuckles in the darkness.

Leaving the shadow of the walls at length, the little army struck off northward through the palm trees on the middle road, as it was called—the road which runs the whole length of Tehâmah midway between the mountains and the sea. Among the trees they met a soldier riding to the city. Him they obliged to dismount. Saïd appropriated his horse and all his weapons, which included a fine spear, while the man himself was forced to go with them. He was an Abyssinian, and no sooner did he learn that Saïd the Squinter was their leader than he joined them heartily. Then one came riding after them upon a donkey with loud reproaches as if their purpose had been open as the day. Him the rabble would have stoned, but Saïd, Jeyyâsh, and Kheyr-ud-dîn prevented them. The king rode up to him and said: "O Sheykh, thou art an ass. I long have wished to say so. The curse of God be on thy learned precedents derived from books. Were we to be led by thee, a century would not suffice for our success. Our own right hands will prove more expeditious by the help of God."

By those words the anger of the mob was turned to merriment, while the old Sheykh withdrew with cries of lamentation, the cries of one sore wounded by a treacherous blow.

The crowd moved on again. They left behind the gardens of Zabîd, and had for some time been defiling through wild country when persons in the rear began to murmur: "Some one follows." A halt was called, when all stood still to listen.

"A single horse," Jeyyâsh pronounced.

"A mule, say rather, O my lord," said Kheyr-ud-dîn.

The noise of hoofs drew nearer, till a voice was heard exclaiming: "Wait for me. Where are the princes? I must speak with them. Who am I but

the Sheykh Muhammad, surnamed Abu Dad, half-dead with the fatigues of travel and fast riding !”

“ A friend ! ” cried Saïd to his people. “ Let him be ! . . . Thou comest in a happy hour, O Abu Dad.”

“ Whither go you ? ”

“ To Al Mahjam, to behead the tyrant.”

“ Allah forbid ! ” cried out the jester like a man possessed. “ The army there consists of many thousands. With these same eyes I saw them march from Sanaa. Moreover, the Suleyhi has had warning of your project. Five thousand men are marching on Zabîd. Mukarram himself sends me to inform you of all this and bids you fly before it is too late.”

Saïd, for all answer, called aloud :

“ O men of good intent, hear our dilemma and make choice. This friend, who is no other than the famous Abu Dad, brings tidings that the enemy has warning of our plan. The Suleyhi sends five thousand soldiers to Zabîd.”

“ What matter, when Zabîd is empty of us ? ” some one laughed.

“ The army at Al Mahjam numbers many thousands. He says there is no hope of our success. He urges us to seek security by flight. For my part, I put trust in God, so have no fear. But you—what say you ? Every man of you who is afraid has free permission to return, and I will not reproach him.”

The answer came in frenzied shouts of “ Yallah ! Yallah ! ” “ Shame to the feeble-hearted ! ” “ God is with us.”

Saïd turned to Abu Dad, remarking merrily :

“ Thou hearest, O beloved ! Come with us and watch the issue. Then, in sh’Allah, thou shalt bear the news to Al Mukarram how I have made the honour of his house a dunghill and borne his father’s head in triumph to Zabîd. I thank thee for thy warning, O my dear ; on this road we should likely meet that

army of five thousand." He rode ahead and shouted :  
" Change direction. Turn to the westward, make for  
the seashore. Forward with me, servants of the vow ! "

Abu Dad continued with them from sheer lassitude ;  
descending from his tired mule, which he turned loose.  
He judged the expedition hopeless, yet was moved to  
share its danger by a strange feeling of remorse and  
loyalty. He chose to walk beside Jeyyâsh whose  
quiet talk was comfortable to him, as the one thing  
stable in a world dissolved and run to madness like an  
evil dream.



## XIV

THE dawn was visible. The line of distant mountains in the east cut hard and clear upon a whiteness as of lilies. Cocks were crowing in the villages ; a cool wind brushed the summits of the rolling plain, where the gloom diminished till Jeyyâsh could see his brother's face distinctly. It was lean and eager. The squinting of the eyes seemed to invest his forehead with a mystic cloud.

A holy man intoned the call to prayer. The king dismounted off his horse ; the rabble halted ; one party praying while the other watched according to the sacred rules of war. Dry earth was used for the prescribed ablutions. When the last band of worshippers arose, it was as though a shower of petals—red and white and sulphur-coloured—were descending on the land. Men's shadows with the shadow of each bush and stone and blade of grass stretched out to westward, blue as indigo. Behind them was the splendour of a conflagration. The sun was looking forth above the highland rampart.

"Allahu Akbar !" shouted Saïd ecstatically. They toiled on over undulating country till they saw the sea. It shone between two tawny headlands at the end of a long vale of sand—a sapphire sprinkled with the dust of diamonds in setting of dull gold ; or like an eye of youthful merriment enlivening a rough and weather-beaten face. The poet of the road from Aden thus extolled it, while the weary crowd praised Allah for

the sight. They hurried down on to the beach, and cooled their limbs and faces in the foam, then straggled northward over rocks and sand, until they came upon a ruined mosque a stone's throw from the shore, beside it a great well of clear, cold water. It was one of those which had been founded by Huseyn ibn Salâmah, the chief saint of Yaman, who like Najâh had been a freedman of the former dynasty. Jeyyâsh retailed the story of that hero's life while all the people rested and refreshed themselves.

"Praise be to Allah!" cried Rashîd the sherbet-seller. "But yesterday I was a man of small ideas, deficient in religious zeal; and now, behold me, a companion of the lords of right, a holy warrior! My mind is opened to me like a book; my soul is growing as flowers spring up after rain; the sun has risen on my darkened life. All by the mercy of the Highest, through no effort of my own. I hear the talk of learned men, the voice of poetry, who yesterday thought only of the profits of my petty trade."

"Praise be to Allah!" cried the people round him. "It is the same with all of us poor slaves of God."

Men drank their fill of water at the well, and ate of the provisions they had brought with them. Then they lay down and slept until a horn was blown at sunset, when they arose, resumed their palm-sticks, and trudged forward once again. Reaching another well soon after daybreak, they rested there until the afternoon. Saïd, who loved horseflesh, spent much time upon his borrowed steed, allowing no one but himself to tend him.

The next advance was over sand-dunes, seldom out of sight of the sea; on which two high-prowed, white-winged barques seemed motionless, but in reality were moving northward far more swiftly than the little army, for ere the sunset they had dwindled to mere specks upon the far horizon. Before the fall of

night a halt was called ; the leaders sought advice as to the way to take. One man, who claimed to know the region, pointed to a ragged growth of tamarisks upon a dune, declaring that it marked the point where they must turn inland, following a shallow wady which ran up behind it. Saïd ordered the advance accordingly ; but they had not marched for half an hour before they lost direction, the sandhills being all alike devoid of landmarks. The crescent moon above the sea was silver in a sky of amethyst. It shed a vague, mysterious light upon that wilderness. The man who had professed to know the way acknowledged ignorance.

It was at that moment that a voice cried :

“ Whither go you ? ” with the accents of a peasant or a herdsman.

“ We would journey to Al Mahjam, to the camp of the Suleyhi.”

“ Deign to follow me and I will lead you to the road.”

They thought but little of it at the time, but when, after they reached the beaten track, their guide was nowhere to be found, though Saïd had promised to reward him, there were awestruck whispers :

“ It was Huseyn ibn Salâmah.” “ Or perhaps El Khidr.” “ Perhaps the Messenger of God himself—God bless and keep him ! ” Men peered at one another in the darkness, and it seemed to many that their numbers had increased miraculously.

“ Sweet is the faith of the unlearned,” said Jeyyâsh to Abu Dad, “ which makes of this our life, which God has ordered with plain laws, a wonderful romance. I praise the Maker of the sun and moon, the Orderer of day and night, Whose visible works are a sufficient witness to His boundless power.”

“ This is no common night, by Allah ! ” exclaimed Saïd, who overheard him. “ It is as the Night of Power wherein the angels and the spirits descend by permission

of their Lord for every work. Strange influences are abroad. I feel it inwardly. Who shall say that hosts of angels are not with us—a small army of the single-hearted, fighting in the way of God—as they were with the small faithful host which fought at Bedr.”

His words were heard of all. “Amin!” was shouted, and then: “Praise to Allah, the Protector of all those who trust in Him!” while the Corân-reader began to chant the verses which commemorate God’s mercy on the field of Bedr: “We supported you with those you could not see.”

“This is not holy warfare, O my brother,” Jeyyâsh in a low tone objected. “It is warfare for our private vengeance and to claim our rights. I entreat thee to remember that it is unlawful, save in so far as it can be accounted just retaliation for the wrongs which we have suffered in the past.”

“Be silent!” whispered Saïd between clenched teeth. “Pursue such talk and I shall surely kill thee. The Sheykh Salâmah judges that our cause is holy since we replant the banner of the true Khalîfah in this land. He is a man as learned as thou art and—which is more than thou art—is my partisan.”

“Alas! Thou knowest that I love thee, as none other.”

“By the life of all created beings, I do know it!” answered Saïd with sudden tenderness. “But speak not now to me of doubt or moderation, for I cannot bear it.”

“I ask thee but to bear in mind the law of God. In thy excitement. . . .”

“Is thy excitement less than mine, O cold of heart? This night and yesterday, and all to-morrow, wherever two men meet together in this land, they speak of me. The hour has come, they say, and Saïd has risen with an army. They ask God to help me. How many prayers for our success are being offered, not only by

the subject people, but the very slaves of the usurper, the Abyssinian soldiers, children of our house ! Look, upon the mountains yonder comes the day. The sun is rising. To-day he shines upon a land disgraced by foul injustice. To-morrow, ere his setting, the dishonour will be purged away, the mouth of that assassin will be filled with dust, in sh'Allah."

"In sh'Allah," said Jeyyâsh with fervour. "That is just. I ask thee only to observe the measure of retaliation."

Saïd ceased not to enlarge upon the justice of his cause, inspiring the tired rabble by his eloquence. He related the whole history of the Bani Ziyâd and their most famous freedmen, the supporters of the Abbasides in Yaman. He recounted their good works, the many mosques which they had built, the colleges and schools, the institutions for the poor, which they had founded, the multitudes of prisoners and slaves emancipated. What had the Suleyhi, champions of the Obeydite pretenders, done to be compared with this ? He told the story of his father's death, his house's exile, with voice half-choked by tears : the people wept. He pictured the approaching death of Ali es-Suleyhi, flourishing his spear ; they laughed : "Ho, ho !"

Praying at noon and at the sun's decline, they crossed the burning plain and reached the foothills. The sun was near his setting when, from an eminence, they saw the camp of the Suleyhi still a long way off. Black Arab tents with here and there a green or white pavilion were dotted on the slopes, around a roomy hollow with a patch of greensward, in which there was a well and near it a fine mosque built for the repose of pilgrims on the way to Mecca. Down in that hollow at a distance from the mosque and well rose the pavilions of the monarch of Al Yaman and his relatives, and of the subject kings he carried with him less as

guests than hostages. The smoke of cooking-fires went up like plumes from the brown hills. A city's din was carried to them on the breeze. The men were awestruck, and their chatter ceased.

"Here in the wady we will sleep to-night," said Saïd, observing their dejection. "A long night's rest. We need it, for we all are weary. Before noon to-morrow, we shall drink in peace at yonder well, as conquerors, please God!"

"Allahu Akbar!" cried the weary crowd with hope revived. Many of them lay down then and there, and fell asleep.

Jeyyâsh aroused them for the prayer of dawn, and when the prayer was ended, Saïd spoke to them. Upon his face there was the rapt expression of one half-blinded by celestial light. They drank in courage from his look and words. The light of faith shone in their eyes when he cried: "Forward!"

"Aye, forward, in the cause of God!" they panted.

And so that little band of seventy set out to pierce a host of fifteen thousand men.

## XV

THE Amîr Ali, son of Muhammad es-Suleyhi, high chief of the Arabs, lord of Yaman, and successful champion of the anti-Caliphate, sat out before his tent upon a carpet under an embroidered canopy. The state umbrella, its great staff supported by two negroes, gave added shade to his illustrious head. Some twenty of his near relations and allies sat with him, forming an incurving line on either hand, the whole group having thus a crescent shape. It was near the third hour of the day, and they had been in council since the morning prayer. The monarch, with a yawn, exclaimed :

“ Praise be to Allah ! Then it is agreed that we strike camp to-morrow and advance towards Sirreyn. The runner from Zabîd assures us that the town is peaceful ; the news concerning Saïd the Squinter was a false alarm, the work of evil jokers, such as has often come to us before from the same quarter. The rogue who brought the lying tale has been beheaded. The troops we sent to quell the rising will rejoin us at Sirreyn where we shall camp some days, to give time for the stragglers to come in. To-morrow, then, with God's permission and with your consent, the horns will sound for the advance. May Allah grant us victory and His acceptance ! ”

A courtier said : “ The glory of thy house increase for ever ! ”

“ In sh'Allah,” said the monarch with another

yawn. He turned towards his brother, Abdullah son of Muhammad es-Suleyhi, and inquired: "What of that girl who took thy fancy a while back? Thou wast quite mad for her three months ago at Sanaa, but since then we have heard no more from thee. Didst ever find out who she was? Didst ever get her?"

The leaders of the host leaned forward confidentially, stroking their beards, and smiling in anticipation of a story. They were all close friends or relatives of the Suleyhi.

The noble-faced Amîr Abdullah heaved a sigh; then with a laugh ejaculated: "Curse her father! She escaped—the little wanton! She played the virgin with me, stood for honourable terms, and afterwards I learnt that she was known to many—among others to our friend Huseyn here present."

"By Allah, yes!" replied the chieftain thus invoked in tones of sweet remembrance. "I know the girl thou meanest. A little devil, like a snake for subtlety. And always after money. I remember well. I bought her of a gipsy. The day when I refused her money, she departed suddenly, and I could never find her, although I knew that she was still in Sanaa. Since then she has befooled a hundred men."

"Did she extract much money from Abdullah?" asked the monarch naively, provoking general laughter, for his brother the Amîr Abdullah was reputed mean.

"Enough," replied that worthy with a rueful air.

"I bought a pearl the other day," remarked a greybeard. "Abbâs the dealer offered her to me before all others in accordance with a compact I have made with him."

"I have the same arrangement with him," said the monarch drily.

"And I." "And I," said others present.

"What was she like?" was questioned on all hands.



Her owner, as an honourable man, would not describe her.

"She must have been deformed in some way, for Abbâs shows me all who are unblemished."

"By Allah, no ; she is a pearl unspotted," declared her owner with malicious triumph in his tone. "Moreover she is of the kind which I like best—those who show gratitude for little benefits and are not proud. It were a shame and a disgrace for an old man like me to give this beard into the hands of a facetious rogue, however charming."

"In point of fact," said the Amîr Abdullah gravely, "the dealers do not hawk round the best maidens who are brought into our country. These are to be obtained through one man only—I mean the Sheykh Salâmah of Zabîd."

"That is true as the Corân," said the Amîr Huseyn. "And he extorts enormous prices for them. Far beyond my means. May his house be destroyed !"

"The girls, after the schooling they receive in his harîm, are worth the price which he extorts," said the Amîr Abdullah in the tone of one who knows. Then, turning to the king, he asked : "What game dost thou pursue at present, O my brother ?"

"At present ? None, by Allah, for the queen is with me. Is she not at present housed in yonder mosque, whence, through that lattice by the gate, she watches us no doubt, and will inquire when I rejoin her presently : 'Why were you laughing when your council was for grave affairs ?' "

Again there was a general laugh, and one remarked : "Such is the nature of the noblest women !"

"With your permission, O my lords," exclaimed a personage who had till then preserved a reverential silence, "I know a tale of love both strange and passionate connected with this very spot. Love, indeed, is as a sunstroke, as a fit of madness ; and

lovers are accountable to God alone. Those who blame the sufferers from this calamity, counting them sinners, are in error always. Yet dignified and noble women ever do so."

The speaker was a petty chieftain named Mashaal, a native of the district, who, for his local knowledge, had been asked to join the council.

"Relate it," ordered Ali es-Suleyhi.

"Relate it; let us hear and judge," the others cried.

But just then the king's eyes caught sight of ragged men approaching, bearing palm-sticks—a strange appearance in the royal camp. He pointed with his hand.

"What men are those?"

"Thy servants, of a certainty," said the Amîr Huseyn, "for Allah knows there is no other kind of man on earth."

The Amîr Abdullah stepped outside the canopy and stared at the approaching shapes, hand shading eyes.

"These are no men of ours," he whispered apprehensively, to those who, out of curiosity, came out beside him. "How did they pass the sentries? I have heard no sound of strife. Yet they surround us. There is one on horseback! Mark him well."

"Bid them depart," said Ali es-Suleyhi.

Suddenly the Amîr Abdullah returned from looking out, and cried excitedly: "These are no other men than Saïd the Squinter and his riff-raff. To horse, my lord, make haste to the encampment of the Arab cavalry. Sound the alarm! Is there no trumpet handy? Then to horse, to horse!"

He ran to the back of the tent where his own horse was tethered. Most of the council wished to follow his example, but their horses had been tethered at a distance, and the approach to them was now cut off by the advancing palm-sticks.

Abdullah called for slaves to come and help him, but no voice replied. Some of the slaves, attempting to escape, were being beaten by the strangers; while others were in helpless flight among the tent-ropes. Returning with his horse he found the king where he had left him, unperturbed to all appearance. The courtiers, thronging round him, spoke of reassurance, but, even while they spoke, they looked behind them, beards on shoulders, at the motley crew of Ethiopians and nondescripts who formed a cordon round the royal quarters.

"Fly, my brother! Mount behind me! Lose not a moment!" pleaded the Amîr Abdullah. But the king stood still.

"Fear nothing!" came the tranquil answer. "I am in no danger; for the seers have declared that I shall meet death in no other place than Ed-Duheyim, beside the water of Umm Maabad, where the Messenger of God (God bless and save him) and Abu Bakr rested in the flight to Yathrib."

"Praise be to Allah!" answered the Amîr Abdullah. "In that case, all is well!"

"Did they specify the well of which the Prophet drank?" Mashaal it was who asked the question in an awestruck tone.

"They mentioned Ed-Duheyim and Bîr Umm Maabad. Is there a doubt?" said Ali es-Suleyhi.

"Then, O my lord, defend thyself; and all here present, be prepared for death; for this, by Allah, is the well of Duheyim, the son of 'Abs, and yonder mosque stands on the spot where once the mother of Maabad the 'Absite pitched her tent. It was of her that I was going to tell a story when these men appeared."

"Merciful Allah! Is this true?"

"By the life of all created beings, it is true, my lord."

“ There is neither power nor might save in Allah the High, the Tremendous ! ”

It was no longer the triumphant conqueror, the lord of Yaman, who stood amid his subject chiefs upon the carpet, but an old man disconcerted and abashed, in deadly awe. He stood as if to pray, but instead of murmuring in prayer his lips were parted in a rigid grin, most terrible to witness, while his starting eyes were fixed upon the mosque where lodged the chaste companion of his life, the Lady Asma. This, then, was Ed-Duheyim and that the water of Umm Maabad, of which his mind had shown him lying pictures ! In the plenitude of his power, in the midst of a host of fifteen thousand of his subjects, in broad daylight, he heard the death shrieks of his friends and kinsfolk, and was reduced from splendid sovereignty to the condition of an abject, conscience-stricken slave of the Most High.

## XVI

THE rabble from Zabîd, as they advanced, attracted hardly any notice in the vast disorder of the camp. With Saïd walking in their midst and the horse led among them, they were taken for a body of the humbler servants of the king ; the more so that they seemed unarmed, the mass of palm-sticks borne between two men resembling at a casual glance some kind of stretcher. Had they appeared at all irresolute or doubtful of the way, it might have roused suspicion, but they went straight towards the royal camp as men who have an errand ; and when, as happened once or twice, a soldier with no hostile purpose shouted : " Whither ? " Saïd made answer without hesitation : " To the king." The host contained so many different kinds of troops, the private household of the monarch was so numerous that no man, uninspired, could have suspected danger in the movements of that little company of dark-skinned men.

The sun was high when they approached the mosque and well. They saw the chiefs in council underneath a splendid awning ; the servants, all unwarlike, sauntering from tent to tent, or sitting here and there in circles, talking.

About the gateway of the mosque, a half-mile distant from the king's encampment, there was a concourse of attendants, busy in its units, seeming idle in the mass, like the gathering of bees about a hive.

" The queen, the Lady Asma, lodges yonder," it was whispered.

Then, at a word from Saïd, the band dispersed in order to surround the royal quarters. As yet their movements had aroused no notice. Some minutes later, the manœuvre having been completed, a servant hurrying in a direction counter to them cried out : "Curse your fathers, O devoid of manners ! Let me pass !" and pushed against the nearest man, the sometime sherbet-seller. He was thrown down and stamped to death as men destroy a beetle. And still there was no sound of an alarm. They kept advancing. At length there rose some slight commotion in the camp. The princes left their council and came forth to shout and stare. The hostage kings came forth from their pavilions. Slaves terrified ran fast from tent to tent. Some of these trying to escape, were beaten back. One of the princes sprang upon a horse and waved a spear. He, with the others, rallied round the king.

Then Saïd gave the order to rush forward, which was repeated round the cordon by Jeyyâsh and Kheyr-ud-dîn and other leaders ; and for ten minutes there was no more thought. Jeyyâsh and Abu Dad who, for the love he bore that reasonable prince, and also for protection, kept behind him always, by chance found a clear passage to the royal tent, where Ali es-Suleyhi stood alone beneath the canopy, while the fight raged close around him in the sunlight. He seemed stupefied. Jeyyâsh transfixed him with a spear snatched from a dead opponent ; then, drawing from the monarch's side the sword, whose prowess had become a byword, with one blow smote his head from off his body.

"Allah have mercy on him !" he suspired as he looked down upon the work. "There is no power nor might save in Allah the High, the Tremendous. Praise be to Allah, Lord of justice as of mercy, who suffers not wrongdoing to go unavenged upon the earth."

He then turned round in search of Abu Dad, but

he was nowhere to be seen. The poor, good man had fled in terror from the gush of blood.

The subject kings, mere hostages of the Suleyhi, had all surrendered, and now watched the combat from a neighbouring tent. Not many yards away a fight was raging, the Suleyhi horseman striving fiercely to break through the hedge of palm-sticks, slaying right and left. Jeyyâsh made haste to help his people. At the same time Saïd and Kheyr-ud-dîn, with a following increased by many slaves of the Suleyhi, came upon the scene. The hero was dragged off his horse and pressed upon the ground by one who laughed like mad. It was the sherbet-seller. He kept crying: "Praise to Allah, Who has let me see this day. Till yesterday I was a man of peace, but now behold me! Am I not a lion of the wilds, a wolf, a fierce hyena, the hand of God to punish bad, proud men?"

He had the strength of madmen in his great excitement. His victim, on the ground beneath him, cried in anguish: "For Allah's love, transfix us both, O any one of rank and honour, who may chance to hear me! I have lived respected. Spare my house the ignominy of my dying at the hands of this low creature in unwarlike wise."

The sherbet-seller, turned hyena, had fixed his sharp teeth in the gullet of the fallen nobleman.

"In the name of Allah!" exclaimed Saïd compassionately, and drove his spear down hard through both of them until it felt the ground.

"It is Ali es-Suleyhi," he exclaimed. "Now reap his head."

"It is Abdullah only," cried Jeyyâsh behind him. "The head of Ali has been reaped already."

"No matter," shouted Saïd, "since both are dead."

A group of frightened slaves pursued by the Zabîdis and pricked by the nailed palm-sticks, howled for mercy.

"Let them alone," the king commanded, and,

turning to the suppliants, he bade them : " Go. Tell all the Abyssinians in the camp that Ali the usurper is no more, and that his power has passed, by God's decree, to Saïd the son of him whom he so foully murdered. Say to the Ethiopians for me : ' Are you not my kinsfolk ? What part had you in truth with this usurper ? Return to me and be partakers of my might and bounty, and may God's mercy and His blessing be upon you.' "

The slaves, with praise to God, sped on their errand. But before they could perform it, a host of near two thousand men approached the royal camp, with angry din. Beyond them could be seen battalions hurrying from all directions. The moment was of awful danger. All seemed lost. But Saïd called out : " They are Abyssinians ! " and rode his horse to meet them, shouting :

" Welcome, O my brothers ! I am Saïd the son of Najâh who was your benefactor. Come, share with me the fruits of victory ! "

There was a moment's hesitation, during which the fate of all the Yaman wavered in the balance. Then a shout went up of " Hail, O king ! " and Saïd from a lonely figure had become the leader of that army.

" And now to make an end," he muttered to his brother when he returned from this adventure and could get away. " The chief supports of the Suleyhi are our captives in these rich pavilions, and the mercenaries bring in others every minute. They ask for mercy, but they will not get it."

Jeyyâsh, in whom all wanton bloodshed roused intense disgust, laid an imploring hand upon his brother's arm, and said :

" In the name of Allah, Merciful, Compassionate, I charge thee, stay thy hand ! The day is ours. The heads of Ali and Abdullah are in thy possession. A



score of their chief men are slain in battle. The honour of our house is thus avenged. Go to the king's tent, call for pen and parchment, and write to Al Mukarram Ahmad, lord of Sanaa, 'Thy father slew my father treacherously, now I have slain thy father and thy uncle. I am satisfied, and henceforth, on my side, the feud is ended. I send thy honourable mother to thee, together with the remnant of thy kinsfolk, under proper escort. Nor is it ever my intention to assail thy sovereign right in Sanaa or in any portion of the highlands.' If what Abu Dad reports of him is true, such a letter at this moment will allay his anger, and secure the peace of all this country for long years to come."

His brother cried impatiently :

"What words are these? Thou bidst me hand my enemy a sword which I have wrested from him."

"As did the Prophet (may God bless and save him), and, so doing, transformed his enemy into a loyal friend."

"Our case is altogether different. 'When thou hast crushed the serpent's tail,' the proverb says, 'make haste to crush his head too while thou hast the power.' Moreover, we must slay them for the pleasure of our new adherents that they may have some part in this our deed. As for the Lady Asma, she shall be my guest, shall honour our poor city by her residence. Thou knowest how she speaks of all our house as slaves, how she it was who urged her lord against us. Thou biddest me restore her with a guard of honour. She shall not lack the guard of honour, but she goes with us. As for the men, they broke alliance with our father. They deserve to die." With that he broke away and shouted: "Kill them! Kill the companions of the tyrant who are in these tents. And of the subject kings, kill all save three whom I shall indicate."

The command was welcomed with a mighty shout. The numbers of the Sunnite host by then had swelled enormously, the Abyssinians pouring in from the surrounding hills. The Caïd Abdullah, husband of the Lady Alia, embraced his nephews, and was given high command. Then, for an hour, there was a butchery. Jeyyâsh, ashamed and sick at heart, withdrew. It was high noon ; the heat was overpowering. He went to sit beside the well of Ed-Duheyim ; where, as he sat, he heard a voice of moaning, and, looking, saw a living man writhing upon the ground beside a corpse. Going to help the sufferer, he saw that it was Abu Dad. The prince inquired what ailed him. The answer was a bitter cry of " Slay me, me also ! I cannot bear this killing of great men who have been kind to me. O my dear lord Mukarram ! How my heart is torn and bleeds when I recall thy great benevolence ! Behold, the glory of thy house is in the dust ! "

The prince considered such affliction beyond mortal's power to comfort. He asked the Lord to heal it, then inquired : " What is this corpse which lies beside thee ? "

" That ? " said Abu Dad indifferently. " It is a corpse I brought away in my dejection with design to bury it, that one good deed might be performed on this most sinful day. I thought it was the body of a stranger till I rested at this spot, when I perceived it was the body of that youthful poet who cheered my lord and me upon the road from Aden. The merit of burying a man one knew and loved is small compared with that of burying a stranger. Moreover, he was very heavy, so I dropped him."

" Wait for night, when you and I will bury all these luckless people, known and strangers, friend and foe. May God have mercy on them ! " said the prince consolingly.

" Our Lord reward thee, O my dear," replied the

jester, sitting up. "I live anew now thou hast shown me something I can do to make amends. And yet thou slewest Ali es-Suleyhi, the father of my noble benefactor, as men slay an ox. How couldst thou do it? The remembrance makes me sick. But thou wilt bury his remains, and all those others. God's blessing be upon thee, yet I fear thy sight."

"When darkness comes," replied the prince, "thou wilt not see me."

They sat together with but little conversation until after nightfall, when they rose up and began the work of burial. First they carried the dead poet's body to the outskirts of a little graveyard which adjoined the mosque. There, working with their hands and with the prince's spear, they dug a hole sufficient to receive the body. Then, that task finished, they walked back towards the camp. Passing in the darkness near a crowd of men, Jeyyâsh called out:

"Who strives in the way of Allah, let him follow me. Great is our need of helpers. We inter the dead! Join us, O true believers. Who has spades or torches?"

"In the name of God," came the reply, and in a minute they had half a hundred helpers, armed with sticks and spades. They found the headless trunk of Ali es-Suleyhi and bore it reverently to the graveyard by the mosque, in silence broken only by the chant of the Corân-reader who on this occasion was no other than Jeyyâsh himself. The grave was quickly dug and filled again. The pious work went on throughout the night. Three hundred graves were made before the dawn. Then Jeyyâsh purified himself beside the well of Ed-Duheyim, two eunuchs of the Lady Asma's household drawing water for him; and then he went once more to face his brother.

## XVII

"WELCOME, O my brother!" shouted Saïd gaily, as Jeyyâsh lifted a corner of the heavy curtain which served as portal to the royal tent. "What do my eyes behold? The dawn is up. I knew it not, by Allah, so immersed was I in pleasant talk. This, O my comrades, is Jeyyâsh, my brother, renowned through all the world for learning and discretion." The company arose upon the prince's entrance with a flattering murmur. "Know, O my dear, that we have sent a company of Abyssinians to waylay the army of five thousand, which that dog dispatched to make an end of us. They are servants of our father. When they hear that Allah has transferred the power to us they will rejoice. . . . What will Al Mukarram Ahmad say when he receives the news, which the Arab cavalry in flight are bearing towards him? And what, this morning, are the feelings of the Lady Asma—she, who ever feigned to hold us in such high contempt! By Allah, now that it is day, we must attend her levée. What say you, O my friends? First let us pray, and then attend me to the mosque out yonder. Let horses be prepared for all here present. . . . Thou sayest thou art hungry, O Jeyyâsh? Well, here is food in plenty. Refresh thy soul, then come along with us."

Jeyyâsh would fain have been excused from going with them, but Saïd was bent upon his company. He found himself obliged to join the jingling cavalcade,

which presently set out to greet the Lady Asma. The parasol of state was carried over Saïd, and on its spike, by way of flattery, some wag had placed the head of Ali es-Suleyhi. The head of the Amîr Abdullah moved hard by, upheld upon a spear above the crowd of foot-farers.

Halting before the gateway of the mosque Saïd bade a eunuch run and tell his mistress that the master of the hour, by Allah's mercy, desired to pay her his respects. After a second and a third demand, the captive queen appeared, a stately figure.

"Come forth, O beauty of the age," said Saïd mockingly, "and give thy morning greeting to these lords." He pointed with his hand towards the severed heads.

"May Allah never give thee a fair greeting, O thou squint-eyed slave," was Asma's answer. Then fixing her great eyes, enlarged by kohl, squarely on his face, she quoted from the ancient poet Imru'l-Keys :

"None boasts against us like the feeble boaster  
And none so arrogant in conquest as the once enslaved."

Saïd made answer with a laugh :

"And verily none snaps so fiercely as the caged she-wolf,  
Who only bites the bars of iron and so hurts herself."

This repartee evoked much laughter of applause.

"Thou hast called me slave, O lady," he continued. "It was a slave of the same breed—the great Huseyn ibn Salâmah—who built this mosque and well. It was a slave of the same breed who gave the owner of that blood-stained head the gold with which he purchased thee, his cousin. He wandered to Zabîd, a beggar, in despair ; a slave befriended him, and so he rose to greatness. It was a slave of the same breed whose greatness, both of soul and body, envenomed his base mind with envy. That slave, my father—the

lord of Yaman and the best of men—he treacherously slew. And now this slave here present—son of him thus slain—as lord of Yaman, claims thee as his guest, O lady, till such time as thou shalt learn that slaves of an imperial house are both in power and breeding nobler than mere mountain tribesmen.”

Long before he finished speaking, the Lady Asma left the doorway with a scornful air.

“Here we will hold our court,” cried Saïd gaily. “Set up the heads beside the gateway. Have the tents brought hither.”

And there his court was held through all that day.

Upon the morrow, some two hours before the day-break, the departure of the army for Zabîd began. Two large detachments were already on the road when Saïd and all his company, preceded by the litter of the Lady Asma and its rabble of attendants, started. Before the litter went the state umbrella, with the head of Ali es-Suleyhi still upon its spike.

“How comely on its summit seems the face  
Which erstwhile looked so vile beneath its shade,”

a poet chanted, and Jeyyâsh could have spat upon the wretch, who, but a few short hours before, had sung the praise of the Suleyhi.

Great clouds of dust ascending from the hills marked the advance of the two hosts preceding them. The dawn was cloudless. A cool breeze was blowing. As the cavalcade, with the two heads and the resplendent litter of the captive queen preceding it, set forward, the Corân-reader began to chant :

“Say: O God, Thine is the sovereignty. The kingdom Thou bestowest upon whom Thou wilt, and whom Thou wilt Thou castest forth from the same. Thou exaltest whom Thou wilt in honour, and whom Thou wilt Thou utterly abasest. In Thy hand is bounty. All things verily are in Thy power. . . .”

A crowd of peasants from the village of Al Mahjam stood on a mound beside the road to watch the spectacle. As Abu Dad passed by them he heard one exclaim :

"The great ones slay each other. God is greater ! Praise to God !"

After trying several times to get in conversation with the king, Jeyyâsh reined in his dancing charger and waited until Abu Dad came up upon a mule. The voice of the Corân-reader intoned :

"Praise be to Allah who gives life to whom He will, and causes whom He will to die, and whom He will He makes to live again.

"All men die. All men must face the meeting with their Lord, the day of Reckoning. Be not of those who forget !"

"Never while I live shall I eject the sound of that man's voice out of my ears," muttered the prince. "It stirs the marrow of my bones. Yet see my brother ! He is light of heart !"

"Have I not seen him ?" answered Abu Dad. "His Majesty attracts the gaze of every eye. By Allah, never saw I a more kingly mien."

Jeyyâsh advised him, laughing : "Waste not praises which, I assure thee, have their price to-day. Ride forward with the other flatterers, O lord of wit, who swear that straight-eyed people are henceforth deformed."

"Nay, but I spoke in earnest, O my lord."

"Forgive me, for my heart is bitter," sighed the prince. "Thou knowest—none so well—how closely he and I were bound together until yesterday. But now I seek my brother, and I find the king. My counsel is regarded as a piece of impudence. . . . The world is so ! It is no matter. Yet it grieves me. Is it still thy plan to leave us, O befriender of our youth ?"

"By my life, I know not. I return now to Zabîd. There I must seek a little girl, bought with my money

in compassion, whom I vowed to Allah to restore to her own folk. That vow performed, I know not whither I shall go. If I followed the direction of my feelings, methinks I should return to Sanaa to the Prince Mukarram." He paused, as greatly fearing he had said too much.

"Why shouldst thou not go back to him?" exclaimed Jeyyâsh benignly. "He charged thee with a message for my brother and for me, and we can both bear witness that thou didst deliver it, and that thou hadst no part in the dishonour of his house. This prince has done thee kindness. It is but seemly thou shouldst show thy gratitude. I will provide thee with a written statement signed by me; and if I still have any favour with my brother, Saïd shall sign it also. Thus shalt thou be cleared of all suspicion of offence."

"Our Lord reward thee, pattern of benevolence! Thou givest freely more than man would dare to ask. Thy words release me from a strange constraint, like palsy, which has afflicted me these five days past."

Their road lay through Tehâmah. When they passed a village, the inhabitants poured forth to watch their going with delight. Long trains of camels with their merry bells diverged from the main road at their approach. At every halt, King Saïd paid homage to the Lady Asma, inquiring how she did, was she fatigued, and so forth. She never answered him on those occasions, but turned her face away in bitter scorn. By his command all care was taken for her comfort.

Among the palm-groves of Zabîd great crowds came out to meet them. On every side black flags—the colour of the Abbasides—were waved in welcome. The reverend doctors from the mosques and colleges advanced in three processions, each of which addressed the monarch through a learned spokesman, recalling the good odour of Najâh, and praying that the son



might follow in the father's footsteps. Saïd, a kingly figure upon horseback, with his joyous air, listened to their speeches kindly, and then summoned to his side Jeyyâsh, to whom he whispered :

"Deal thou with them. They are more thy folk than mine." He added in a tone which all might hear : "Apportion thou my bounty. See to it that no mosque or oratory, nor any pious institution, have just cause to call me niggard. Announce, moreover, that I pay the dowry and furnish forth the wedding of a hundred virgins, and assume the cost of a great festival to celebrate the circumcision of as many boys. Be with me at the sunset, O my brother."

When Jeyyâsh at length, after a long confabulation with the doctors in the cloister of the mosque of Ibrahîm, approached the palace, he saw a crowd before a house adjacent to it—a fine house, with an open space before it. They were staring upwards at the heads of Ali and Abdullah es-Suleyhi set up on brackets fitted to the wall beneath a lattice. Some of the Learned, who accompanied the prince, inquired with indignation : "What means this ?"

"It is there that they have lodged the Lady Asma," said a member of the crowd. "The house, they say, is furnished like a lodge of paradise. Within, her eyes have pleasure, but, on looking forth, she is like, I think, to be reminded of calamity. That is her lattice, just above the head of Ali."

The explanation ended with a brutal laugh. The learned men, disgusted, sighed :

"It is not well."

And Jeyyâsh, who had been trying all the afternoon to clear his brother in their thinking from the charge of cruelty, sighed also and agreed it was a pity.

## XVIII

EARLY on the morning after that triumphal entry, the Sheykh Muhammad, nicknamed Abu Dad, sat cross-legged opposite the house in which the Lady Asma was imprisoned, upon a mat which he had brought with him, against the wall. The early sunlight bathed the captive's lattice and the severed heads beneath. It was those heads, and nothing else, that he had come to contemplate, because they symbolized the question which perplexed his soul. Deaf to the cheerful tumult of the city, the cries of salesmen and the banter of the passing crowd, blind to the distracting charms of colour and of movement, he sat and gazed upon those ghastly trophies, attentive to the thoughts which they aroused in him.

His mind was more at rest than it had been since he set out from Dahlak ; for, repairing to his former lodging on the previous day, prepared to see it the abode of strangers, he had found the wife whom he had left behind there waiting his return in all fidelity, the chamber swept and garnished, and supplied with comforts. Her unaffected joy at sight of him, the feast she made for his delight, the night he spent with her, restored his self-conceit, the spring of energy. But though he loved his pleasure, he was still a Muslim—that is to say, a free, unblinded thinker. He did not seek his pleasure in illusions of the brain, nor did he idolize material enjoyment. His comfort, once obtained, enabled him to think more freely than it had been possible for him to do with mind distressed.

Even at the height of luxury and fame, in the reign of King Najâh, he had preserved some piety ; and amid the horror of the last few days he had almost decided to become a hermit. But in the turmoil of emotions he had been unable to think clearly and consult his conscience. Now, with reason re-enthroned by woman's kindness, he faced the problem squarely :

" What to do ? "

Staring at the gruesome heads protruding from the sunlit wall beneath the richly ornamented lattice, he exclaimed in thought :

" O Ali, gone to Allah's mercy, thou wast but a name to me—a name of power imposing awe on all mankind. Thou, O Abdullah, hast bestowed on me a word occasionally. But to the son of one of you, the nephew of the other, the noble and good-natured Al Mukarram Ahmad, I am indebted under Allah, for this air which now I breathe. To-day the Lady Sayyidah, who hates me, is saying : ' See, that Hud or Abu Dad, whom thou didst let go free, was present at the slaughter of our house, and doubtless bore his part in the atrocious deed. Better have cut his head off, as I purposed.' And my good-natured lord will hang his head before her.

" And thou, O Asma, there behind that lattice, wilt surely testify against me if by any art thou canst dispatch a letter to the prince thy son. Thy soul at present, naturally, is all spite, and spite engenders superhuman cunning.

" Here I might live in splendour, for my lord is generous. There, at Sanaa, danger and, it may be, death await me. All men die. If God so wills it I shall die this minute. This wall on which I lean my back will fall and crush me, or a bolt from yonder sapphire sky will take my life. Henceforth I have two patrons, both beloved ; I cannot serve the one without offence to the other ; so I must part from

both. Oh, well for me if I had been a simple partisan like Kheyr-ud-dîn.

"And so it is decided, O you lifeless heads, and, with God's leave, I go to Sanaa, carrying a testimonial from the king for my protection. And after that, if I am still alive, I will restore my little girl to her relations in accordance with my vow. And then, in sh'Allah, I shall lead a quiet life."

So thinking, he arose, picked up the mat on which he had been sitting, and proceeded to the house of the Sheykh Abdul Halîm. After some delay, for it was still quite early in the morning, the historian received him.

"I ask thy pardon for disturbing thee at such an hour. Anxiety and love are my excuse," said Abu Dad. "I come to fetch the little girl whom I confided to thee, with prayers to Allah to reward thy vast benevolence."

"The girl is safe, in sh'Allah, but she is not here. The hour was late when I returned that night," replied the learned man in some confusion. "The women of my house were all asleep. I feared to rouse them lest there should be angry screams. I took her to my neighbour, Sheykh Salâmah, whose house is more accustomed to receive chance comers."

"Merciful Allah!" gasped the jester, limp all over. After a moment he exclaimed in broken tones: "Thou didst not well. The harîm of Sheykh Salâmah is of ill repute."

"Nay, that it is not," said the other irritably. "One thing I know: that girls from his harîm are sought in marriage by the chiefs of all Arabia. That is proof sufficient that he does not wrong them. God knows, I have no liking for the man, but in this matter I esteem him strictly honourable. . . . What could I do? I ask thee!" he cried out in anger. "I tell thee it was late at night. My companion—since thou

must know all—is jealous. She suspects me—a learned doctor of religion and advanced in years—of conduct shameful in a youthful libertine. The girl is only ten years old, thou sayest? What cares she? . . . Go to the Sheykh Salâmah, tell thy story; the child will be restored to thee without the slightest difficulty. . . . And so the Squinter reigns. I saw his triumph. Yet would he have done better to be guided by my counsels. His throne rests on no sure foundation, being the work of sinful violence and not of statecraft.”

Leaving the old eccentric to his grumbling, Abu Dad departed with a heavy heart, bending his steps towards the house of Kheyr-ud-dîn, whom he found sitting in his doorway, sewing patches on an ancient cloak, and talking to the doves which fluttered near, for all the world as if he had not left that spot nor ever in his life participated in the strife of kings.

“Why come to me?” he asked, when he had heard the jester’s story. “Thou hast abjured our party, is not that the case? My lord Jeyyâsh upholds thee: he is learned. But I, a simple man, unskilled in subtleties, call one who joins the enemy a traitor.”

“By Allah, thou art misinformed,” said Abu Dad pacifically. “Like thee, I am unable to make fine distinctions in the realm of duty. The Prince Mukarram has been kind to me. Therefore I feel a strong affection for him, which goes against my spirit’s life-long bondage to the children of Najâh. For this cause I am minded to take leave of both of them, and give the remnant of my days to Allah’s worship.”

“Good,” answered Kheyr-ud-dîn in much more friendly tones. “I also, for my soul’s sake, have refused rewards. Nor will I ask a favour of my lord if I can help it, for that way leads to envy and ambitious strife.”

"Yet I dare hope that thou wilt deign to speak for me."

"I speak for thee! Thy favour is as great as mine, and both our favour put together comes not near to equal that enjoyed at present by the Sheykh Salâmah. It was he who warned our lord to give no quarter to the Arab chiefs. The Prince Jeyyâsh dislikes him for that reason. Go to the Prince Jeyyâsh. That is my best advice."

"Our Lord increase thy wealth and guard thee ever!"

The jester went back to his house and broke his fast, expounding his dilemma to his wife and comforter.

"It is true, as our renowned historian declared," she said; "the Sheykh Salâmah does not spoil the value of the girls he harbours. But, on the other hand, he does not part with them save for a price. Go to the Câdi, I advise thee, and make formal claim."

The jester hemmed and hawed. Had the girl Yasmînah been in truth his daughter, as for peace and quiet he had told his consort that she was, the course suggested would have been the natural one for him to take. But she was not; and so he sighed:

"I have no proofs or witnesses. I am to all intents a stranger in this city, of which my adversary is a splendid ornament. I seek an advocate in the Amîr Jeyyâsh."

"Ah, there thou knowest best; I cannot help thee," sighed the woman. "But if thou needest one to intercede for thee with Sheykh Salâmah personally, by Allah, I believe I know the very man. He is called the Sherîf Khalf, and is a recent comer to the city—a descendant of the Omeyyad Khalîfahs, if report speaks true. The voices of the poor are loud in praise of him. He lives on terms of friendly intimacy with Salâmah."

"Where is his dwelling?" asked the jester hopefully.

"That I know not. But any one in the great mosques could name it to thee."

It was Friday. All the greater mosques were crowded for the noonday prayer, the people flocking eagerly to hear the Khutbah\* recited in the name of the Abbasides after so long an interval. Abu Dad was in the mosque of Ibrahim, among the hindmost. The service ended, he inquired of those around him for the Sherif Khalf.

"He was here beside us but a minute since," he learnt. "Make haste, and thou wilt overtake him ere he reach his lodging, which is near the sepulchre of Kumm."

The jester hurried out, but all the ways were crowded. By dint of questioning he found the Sherif's lodging, only to be informed that he was not at home. Returning to the courtyard of the mosque, he spied the Sheykh Rashid, the former tutor of the king, set in an alcove, surrounded by a congregation of the Learned, who were paying court to him. It was long ere Abu Dad could gain his private ear. When he did obtain a hearing, it was already the middle of the afternoon. The muezzin had begun to call the 'Asr prayer.

"When the prayer is ended we will go together to our lord Jeyyâsh," replied the Sheykh benignly.

Abu Dad demurred at so direct a process, but the sage encouraged him, exclaiming: "Dost thou fear to-day the man who yesterday was as thy sister's son? Has our lord changed his nature in a single night? Fear nothing, for he speaks of thee with favour, praising thy resolution to have done with politics. No more propitious day for asking ever dawned than this. The king the prince, and all who bear them company,

\* Sermon.

are full of joy ; and benefits flow from them like the rays from yonder sun. . . . What is the nature of your business, O my dear one ? ”

“ It concerns a girl.”

A smile disturbed the features of the reverend Sheykh and moved his beard.

“ A very young girl, may it please your honour, and one in the position of a ward to me.”

A half-hour later, at the palace, Jeyyâsh asked him :

“ What is the matter of thy pleading ? ”

“ It concerns a girl.”

The jester was astonished and aggrieved when all men laughed.

“ A little maiden,” he cried lamentably, “ who is at present in the household of the Sheykh Salâmah ; wrongfully detained, for she is mine by purchase. I have made a solemn vow, if may be, to restore her to her people, from whom she was dissevered by the chance of war.”

“ This, O my dear, is no affair of mine,” replied Jeyyâsh. “ I have no standing with the Sheykh Salâmah, nor desire to deal with him. Ask the king, my brother ! ”

“ That I dare not,” said the jester, trembling.

The words were still upon his lips when Saïd himself came through the doorway, crying :

“ Rejoice with me, my brother. I bring happy news. Our men have taken all the forts which guard the passes.”

“ Praise be to Allah ! ” said Jeyyâsh. “ For other reasons thou comest opportunely here among us. Here is our old friend, Abu Dad, with a petition, which he is too modest to present to thee in person.”

“ What is this petition, O beloved ? ” asked the king good-naturedly.

“ Be pleased to know, O monarch of the age, that



it concerns a girl," said the fat jester in a tone of misery.

The words provoking roars of laughter, he looked round with such a visage of amazement and reproach as much increased the storm of merriment.

"A quite young girl," he wailed, "and very innocent—withheld from me! It is a matter of importance, may it please your Majesty, because of a vow which I had made to Allah in an hour of danger, concerning, as I said, a girl extremely young."

"Think of thy paunch and thy grey hairs, and be ashamed, O son of infamy! Give up thy talk of girls extremely young!" volleyed the king, beside himself with mirth.

"But it is true!"

"Be silent, ancient malefactor! Wouldst destroy me quite? Thou hast pierced my sides as with a sword by thy buffoonery."

The jester closed his eyes and murmured:

"Allah! Allah!"

"He seems indeed in earnest," one objected.

"That it is which nearly kills me," gurgled Saïd, in pain for breath.

"This girl, he says, is in the harim of the Sheykh Salâmah."

"No bad place for a girl to be in," laughed the king. "The Sheykh Salâmah should be somewhere in the palace. Bring him hither. Let the jester do his worst upon so grave a man."

"O Sheykh Salâmah," he exclaimed a minute later, when the dignified defendant stood before him. "Our friend and faithful servant there, the Sheykh Muhammad, has a grief against thee."

"Of what nature?" asked Salâmah blandly.

"Well thou knowest, it concerns a girl," vociferated Abu Dad. Again there was a roar of laughter, but he paid no heed to it. "Hear now and judge between

us twain, O king and all here present ! ” And he told his tale from the beginning to the end. It was interrupted by guffaws at mention of the great historian.

“ What sayest thou, O Sheykh ? ” asked Saïd when it was ended.

“ I say that, if the jester’s statement were correct, he owes me thanks, not insult, since I have shown kindness to a ward of his,” replied the Sheykh Salâmah with a smile of patience. “ I say, moreover, that he cannot blame me for withholding her since he has never come to claim her at my hands.”

“ Wilt thou restore her to me ? ” shouted Abu Dad.

“ What sayest thou to that, O Sheykh ? ” inquired the king.

“ If all that he has stated were correct, I might consider his request. But what proof has he ? I know nothing of this girl.”

“ He has her in his house,” cried Abu Dad “ The Sheykh Abdul Halîm, who tells the truth, assured me of it.”

“ This girl—supposing she exists,” pursued Salâmah unconcernedly, “ was no doubt the joy of his declining years. He thought she loved him. Age is easily deceived. Now she has run away with some more youthful lover, leaving him demented as we now behold him.”

“ No, by my life ! It is not so, O king.”

“ The case is not uncommon,” chuckled Saïd.

The Sheykh Salâmah craved leave to withdraw.

When he was gone, Saïd turned to Abu Dad and, with a laugh, observed :

“ He beat thee fairly. With all thy teasing thou didst not abate one tittle of his dignity.”

The jester gave a cry to Allah, then broke down completely.

“ My little girl ! My sugar-plum ! ” he blubbered ; and then again : “ My vow ! My vow to God ! ”

“ Merciful Allah ! Wast thou then in earnest ? ” gasped the king. “ I thought thy talk of girls a jest or wile, born of some grudge against the Sheykh Salâmah.”

“ And so did I, by Allah,” said Jeyyâsh.

“ How is the greatest of all jesters fallen thus to become a laughing-stock at unawares ! ”

Abu Dad was thunderstruck. In a flash he saw himself as they beheld him. Truly he had fallen from his high estate as merrymaker. Here was a day of high rejoicing for the princes, a day when Abu Dad of old would have devised some cunning hoax for their delight. Beholding him on such a day they looked for fun ; while he, poor slave of the Most High, had since the daybreak held no thought which was not grave and anxious. He wished the floor would open and engulf him.

## XIX

IN his extreme surprise at the discovery that the world's most famous joker was for once in earnest the king had quite lost sight of his old friend's petition. To Abu Dad, in his dejection, it seemed useless to remind him of its nature, even if he could have raised his voice above the din of comic exclamation which now filled the room. As soon as he could do so without impoliteness, he took leave ; when a man who had been present all the while approached him, saying :

“ Follow the Sheykh Salâmah to his house. Our lord Jeyyâsh has sent me to advise thee. The Sheykh takes pride in showing independence before men of rank, but he will not repel a humble suitor. A strange being ! If it can serve thy purpose with him, use my name—I am the Sherîf Khalf, the Omeyyad.”

But Abu Dad, though he gave proper thanks to this adviser, was too downcast to follow the advice he gave. It came too late. Could he now cringe before the man whom he had just insulted, or could the depth of his humiliation be increased ?

He was hurrying across the courtyard with head bowed when a strong hand smote his shoulder and a hearty voice exclaimed :

“ God keep thee, O my soul ! Whither away ? ”

It was the Caïd Abdullah, into whose astonished ears the jester straightway poured his tale of grief, with sobs and frantic wringing of the hands.

“ Come to my wife ! ” implored the Caïd excitedly.

"She more than anybody has the will to serve thee in this matter, having herself a grudge against this same Salâmah. He wants a girl from his harîm to queen it in Zabîd, while she (my lady) would have her nephew wed the daughter of an Arab chief, and so secure alliances. Come with me now. . . . Thou wonderest how my wife escaped from Sanaa? Well, so do I, by Allah. She arrived this morning."

The Caïd half led, half dragged the jester through a doorway, along a corridor, and down some steps into a little garden, breathing perfumes in the twilight, beyond which were the quarters of his lady wife. After much palaver, and bustling to and fro of maids and eunuchs, they were shown into her presence. She held out a jewelled hand to Abu Dad, who kissed it with respect; then heard his story. When he had finished speaking, she sprang up and clapped her hands.

"Bring pens and ink and parchment instantly!" she told the slaves who came in answer to her summons. But when the things were brought, she did not use them, bidding a eunuch take them to the doorway of the king's apartments and there wait for her.

"In sh'Allah, I will utterly abase that cunning Sheykh, who to my knowledge is no better than a common pander. He would frustrate the project I have most at heart—the marriage of our dear one with a girl freeborn and noble. He would unite the lord of Yaman to a girl from his own household—which means, in his interests—a girl trained only to excite desire. . . . Have no fear, O poor, ill-used one! Remain here till I return."

Abu Dad waited for an hour in the dim, perfumed chamber, conversing with the Caïd and drinking sherbet, till the dame returned. She seemed but half content.

"That rascal's hold on the king's mind is strong," she told them, "but, please God, I have shaken it a

little. O Abu Dad, receive this little parchment. It is an order in the king's own hand to Sheykh Salâmah."

Led forth into the courtyard by the friendly Caïd, the jester breathed with rapture the pure air of night, having been half asphyxiated by the reek of perfumes burnt and sprinkled in the lady's room.

In the gateway of the Sheykh Salâmah's house a servant challenged him. "A message from the king!" he cried, and was at once admitted.

The Sheykh received him in a manner which so perfectly suggested that he had never in his life set eyes on him before, that Abu Dad, though on his guard against evasion, was disconcerted and abashed. Salâmah begged him to be seated, placing cushions for him, and then perused Saïd's letter by the light of a fine silver lamp which hung down from the vaulted ceiling.

"What wouldst thou?" he inquired abruptly, folding up the letter. "This girl here mentioned—what is thy concern with her?"

"My concern is to restore her to her people in accordance with a solemn vow which I have made to God."

"By what right dost thou claim control of her?"

"By right of purchase. Deign to hear my story!"

"No need of that! . . . Hast any witnesses?"

"The Sheykh Abdul Halîm, to whom I gave the girl in trust, can testify that he received her from me." Strive as he would the jester could not rid himself of the illusion that he was arraigned before a judge, and somehow guilty.

"That is not enough. . . . The reason why I ask so many questions is not mere idle curiosity, believe me, but simply this: The king commands me to appear with thee before the Câdi. But, by my life, it seems to me, the trial would avail thee little, since thou canst bring no witness to thy right of guardianship."

"Produce the girl herself. She knows the truth. Let me have speech of her," pleaded the jester hoarsely.

"I say not 'No' to that," replied the Sheykh Salâmah, after brief reflection. "If the girl, with her own lips, assures thee that she wishes to remain beneath my roof, wilt thou accept her statement and refrain from further insults?"

"Insults! Just Allah! I but claim my legal right! . . . Yet if in talk alone with me, unwatched, uninfluenced, she chooses thy protection, I have nought to say. I vowed to liberate her: she is free to choose. She will choose me, her more than father, well I know it. But if—which God forbid—her choice should go against me, then must thou assume the burden of my vow, and promise to restore her to her folk within a certain time."

"Agreed," replied the Sheykh Salâmah, rising. "Keep seated, I beseech thee. She shall come to thee."

Not until it was empty of the owner's presence had the jester eyes for the adornments of the room, its silver lamp, its costly rugs and cushions, and the texts of scripture inlaid on its walls. He was trying to decipher an inscription in old Kufic character, when the door was opened and Yasmînah stood before him. He started up and caught her to his breast. In the first transport of beholding one whom he had counted lost, he failed to notice her reluctance in his fond embrace. Then he inquired:

"What ails thee, O my loved one? Art thou not glad to see again thy willing slave? Hast thou forgotten how I carried thee along the banks between the cornfields there at Sanaa; how, in our joy, we mocked the singing of the birds, the groaning of the water-wheels?"

"I would forget," replied Yasmînah, shamefaced. "All that befell there is now hateful to me. I and my

mother were dragged thither by the children of iniquity—and thou didst buy us—us, the daughters of a noble house. Thou wast kind and gentle ; and for that thou hast my gratitude. And yet thou didst forsake me of a sudden in the dead of night—didst throw me on the bounty of a grudging stranger.”

“ What words are these ? ” cried Abu Dad as one distraught. “ Repel me not, O sunshine of my life ! ”

“ Listen, O lord of kindness,” said the girl in coaxing tones. “ Here in this house I live in honour, I receive instruction. The owner is a man of wealth and learning. He has vowed to make me worthy of my people, who, degraded as I was before, would have disowned me. . . . ”

“ But . . . O pearl of price ! . . . O crescent moon amid the darkness of my age ! . . . O little sugar-plum ! ” the jester moaned.

“ Say nothing ! Only be not angry if I choose to stay here. My prayers for thee shall never cease while life endures. Believe me not ungrateful, O my more than father ! ”

She spoke with grave precision, yet with feeling. Having spoken, she clapped her hands imperiously—like a queen, he thought enraptured—and, having kissed his hand and pressed her forehead to it, left the room.

So lost was he in admiration of her royal manner that he failed to notice the re-entrance of the Sheykh Salâmah. He started at the question :

“ Art thou satisfied ? ”

“ Aye, by the Lord ! ” he murmured. “ But my heart is slain.”

“ I but relieve thee of a burden : thou wilt learn to know it,” said the Sheykh benevolently. “ This girl bears promise of surpassing beauty. She will need protection in a year or two, and must be closely guarded. What would have been thy fate, a poor



man and a rover, when all the world ran mad for love of her? ”

“ Perhaps the right is with thee,” sighed the jester.

The Sheykh then summoned two male relatives of his, and in their presence promised, under Allah, to restore the girl Yasminah safely to her tribe and family within the space of four years after she attained the age of puberty. Abu Dad paid little heed to these proceedings, for, to his mind, the business was already done.

Returning to his dwelling in the darkness, he was sad at heart. But at the door the smell of supper cooking raised his spirits. His kind companion gave him comfort when she heard his story. She painted an attractive picture of their life to come. He ate his supper and slept soundly through the night.

The next day was consumed in taking leave of people. His first call was upon the Caïd Abdullah, who was glad to see him and, after talking for an hour—the time, he hinted, requisite for that toilette without the benefit of which his lady would be seen of no man—took him again into the perfumed chamber.

“ By Allah, thou didst wrong not to insist,” exclaimed the Lady Alia when she had heard his news. “ He would not have dared to disobey the king’s command ; and for the girl, since she is so high-minded thou couldst have brought her here. Salâmah is a prince of cunning and the worst of men, though sometimes one is tempted to suppose him half a saint, so just are his reflections and so grave his manner. The king decides against him in the matter of the marriage ; a boon for which we have to thank the captive Asma—poor unhappy lady—under Allah. She told him that no daughter of the Arabs would deign to wed an upstart slave like him. That was last evening. And to-day he swears that he will wed no other than the Arab girl I had

proposed to him, in order that the Lady Asma may be proved a liar, and so further humbled. . . . May Allah keep thee in thy goings, O old friend ! Fain would I too revisit Sanaa if only to be near the Lady Sayyidah. There is none like her in this city, where the women are mere sycophants—save only Asma, poor afflicted creature, who is ice to me.”

It was with emotion that the jester parted both from her and from the Caïd her husband—staunch friends both.

His second visit was to Prince Jeyyâsh, to claim fulfilment of his promise to provide him with a testimonial which, if shown to Al Mukarram, would avert his wrath.

“ So thou journeyest, in truth, to Sanaa ? Allah guard thee ! ” said Jeyyâsh regretfully. “ The road is far from safe, by all accounts. Our people hold the entrance to the passes ; but beyond that, in the highlands, God alone knows what is happening. We hear that many of the clans have risen and seized tracts of country, taking advantage of Mukarram’s stupefaction. . . . Well, thou shalt have the written testimony which I promised. Come for it at the third hour after noon.”

Abu Dad thanked him and departed. In the crowded antechamber he remarked a number of the Learned, clasping manuscripts, awaiting audience of a prince renowned for love of books. He spent the hours until the time appointed in farewells of all descriptions, praying at noon before the tomb of King Najâh, and standing for ten minutes throwing durrâh to the pigeons of the mosque of Ibrahîm. At the third hour after noon he once more waited in the prince’s antechamber, where soon Jeyyâsh came out to him, exclaiming : “ Follow me. I have command to bring thee to the presence of the king.”

Saïd was reclining upon cushions in a cloister which

had outlook on a garden where a fountain trickled. Around him were a score of courtiers, among whom the jester spied with shame the Sheykh Salâmah.

"Welcome, O Abu Dad!" called out the monarch gaily. "And so thou goest, as we hear, to Sanaa, braving unknown danger? By Allah, thou art grown a lion in these latter days! . . . We shall be grateful if thou canst by any channel send us tidings of the feelings and behaviour of Mukarram in his great misfortune. We have the honour and delight to entertain his lady mother. But our benevolent concern embraces all the family. Here is the writing which our brother promised thee on our behalf."

Abu Dad bowed himself almost to the ground as he received the document.

"It is a shame for thee to seek amusement at the cost of the unfortunate," Jeyyâsh reproached his brother in half-playful tones.

"Nay, by the Kaabah, he who cannot see the anguish of the conquered is robbed of half the victory," replied the king. "What say you, O my friends; is it not sweet to watch the sorrow of an enemy?"

"It is as a sauce with meat. They who have once tasted it despise the meat alone," observed a courtier.

"It distinguishes the thoughtful creature from the savage," said the Sheykh Salâmah, in a tone which struck the jester as pure irony.

"That is how I see it, O my earnest brother. Yet I would have thee understand that we attach no onerous condition to our bounty in the case of Abu Dad; we take farewell of him, and we ask God to bless him. Only, if he can by any chance regale us with a humorous account of Al Mukarram's grief and of the wrath of Sayyidah, we shall become his debtors in our turn."

The jester, much affected by this kindness, kissed the monarch's hand, and fled into the palace. It was like a sudden plunge from day to night, he told himself,

so radiant was the atmosphere of Saïd's happiness, so beautiful the man himself in his triumphant joy. Jeyyâsh it was who led him to the treasury and there bestowed on him a bag of gold.

"Means for thy journey," he said graciously. "And money due from us for years of service."

With that the prince embraced him, and departed quickly.

The jester stumbled out into the sunlight. Soldiers paraded in the palace-yard, with blast of horns and beating of small drums. He hardly saw or heard them, but moved forward with uncertain steps a little distance, then sank down by a wall. Thence, when his eyes became of use again, he saw confronting him two severed heads set up beneath a lattice. He was looking at the prison of the Lady Asma, and at an opening of the lattice was the lady's haggard face.

"I have concluded my allegiance to one dynasty," he murmured. "Now I go to end my duty to the other."

Many people passed him where he sat. They were but shadows of a dream to him. But all at once a face and form appeared familiar and disturbed his brain. Where had he seen them? Something discrepant with the garb of a poor herdsman obliged his eyes to follow the receding figure. It was soon met and accosted by another. Both returned towards him, close in conversation, yet keeping, as it seemed, a furtive watch on the house opposite. They stopped before him. He could see their faces plainly, hear their tones. They both were men of Sanaa, from the house of the Suleyhi. Already Al Mukarram's emissaries were at work, seeking to establish correspondence with the royal prisoner.

The jester shrugged his shoulders. He had done with plots.

## XX

IF the Lady Asma had, in her prosperity, been famed for pride, that quality was not diminished by her evil fortune. It was rather aggravated by the splendour of her prison house, and embittered by the outward honour paid to her on every hand ; for never in her life, as she was driven to confess in secret, gnawing her lips in unavailing rage, had she enjoyed such luxury or been the object of so much polite concern. The victor's daily visits mortified her to the point of frenzy. He came but for a moment ceremoniously, to ascertain, as he declared, that she was well and comfortable ; she knew he came to gloat upon her martyrdom. It made her hate him yet the more to realize that he was not, upon the whole, ill-natured in his feelings for her ; that his wish was but to take a courtly vengeance for her lifelong arrogance towards his family ; and that, were she to humiliate herself before him but a little, he would let her go. The Lady Alia implored her to make full submission ; but Asma, smarting with resentment of an insult which could only, from its very nature, be washed out in blood, was quite intractable. In the daily interview with her oppressor she used words nicely calculated to incense and wound. His careless laugh sent madness to her brain. She longed to kill him where he stood. The sense of helplessness made her limbs ache as with the weight of actual chains.

She was free to go abroad at her convenience, either

in a litter or on horseback, he informed her, to smell the air among the palm-groves or beside the river. A guard of honour always waited her commands. But she would have taken poison sooner than go riding thus in state, a gazing-stock for all the rascals of Zabîd, her former subjects. She never went beyond a small secluded court belonging to the palace, and usually kept her own apartments. The severed heads beneath her lattice had no horror for her. They were records of the past. Her spirit strained towards the future. For hours she sat beside the window, looking out.

In secret she wrote often to her son Mukarram, informing him of her condition in the hope of rescue. During the first three months of her captivity she sent off five such letters by the hand of trusted servants. None of the messengers returned to her ; but Saïd in his visits spoke in such a manner that she knew that they had all been caught, the letters confiscated. At last she gave up the attempt, and waited patiently, with prayer to God, the flame of hope still burning in her breast.

One day, while she was sitting at the lattice, a girl from Sanaa, who was at her side, exclaimed :

"Allahu Akbar ! There is Hasan ibn Fâdil ; and yonder man in the striped cloak and white kuffiyeh—is it not Omar the night-porter, O my lady ? See, they watch our lattice ! Or perhaps it is the heads below that they observe with anguish. God grant deliverance may be at hand ! "

"Deliverance is still far distant," sighed the lady. "I have seen the men a hundred times out there, and tried in vain to get communication with them. I will try again. Attract their notice, O Habîbah ! "

"To hear is to obey," replied the girl. The Lady Asma went into another chamber and there wrote words upon a slip of parchment. When she returned the maiden told her :

"They have seen me. They devour the lattice with their eyes."

"Good," said the queen. Opening a wicket in the lattice, she threw out the little note and watched its fall. It was picked up immediately, but by a servant of the palace, who grinned up at her. The men from Sanaa had made no attempt to reach it. They had moved away.

"Praise be to Allah, they mean business," said the Lady Asma. "They will not risk suspicion. They are here for long."

She left the window and took up her needlework.

Upon the next day the same men were there before the house, but in a new disguise, this time as beggars. They squatted by the wall across the way, but when the lady beckoned to them, they came over, intending, as it seemed, to sit beneath her lattice. But soldiers fell upon them, with a shout: "Forbidden!" The beggars quietly returned to their first resting-place. Thence presently a cry arose.

"O lords of kindness, bread!" It was the voice of Hasan ibn Fâdil, and the remembered accents sent a thrill through all the body of the Lady Asma. "Bread, before all things. Dost ask me why we ask for bread and not for coin? It is because of strange good fortune which befell a certain saint whose followers we are. A portion of God's Scripture, which men counted lost, came to him in a loaf of bread. Between the upper and the lower crust it lay concealed. Each day a loaf supports our life. And then one day, if God so wills it, will come rare good fortune to us, as to our master, in a slab of bread—a blessing in a blessing. God is gracious!"

The words were heard of all the passing crowd, but only for the captive at the lattice had they hidden meaning. The beggars after that made moan at intervals, and always in their cry they mentioned bread.

When the Squinter came to mock her, as his custom was, next morning, asking to know if there was anything that he could do to make her stay more comfortable, she subdued her angry soul for once to ask a favour.

"Fain would I give a trifle to the poor who make petition in the street below my lattice. For one accustomed to relieve the wants of others, comfort without the power to do so is like want."

"With pleasure and alacrity!" cried Saïd. "A whole sheep shall be roasted every day, its flesh distributed among the needy in thy name."

"May thy wealth increase!" replied the lady grudgingly. "But I had rather give a smaller dole in person. I crave but leave to send out bread to those who call on Allah's mercy at my gate."

"Thou hast permission, but each loaf must be examined for fear lest it should hide some message."

"So be it."

Saïd seemed greatly pleased. "By Allah," he exclaimed, "it cheers our soul to find thee more content with our poor house and city which soon will be the scene of great rejoicings, in which we humbly beg that thou wilt take a part. O lady, didst thou not declare on one occasion that no noble daughter of the Arabs would ever be allowed to mate with such as us—a slave, if I remember rightly, thou didst call us?" Here he chuckled. "Art still of that opinion, may I ask?"

"Aye, by Allah!" All the lady's self-imposed restraint had vanished in a trice. Her bosom rose. Her persecuted, harassed soul flamed out against him. "No maiden of an honourable house would stoop to thy embrace; or, if she did so far depart from honour, her relatives would take no rest till they had slain both her and thee; her very mother would disown and spit upon her."



“ Blessings on thy lips ! ” said Saïd with his tormenting laugh. “ Know, then, that a most noble lady, Sâlihah, the daughter of the Sheykh of Akd, is given to me by her parents with obsequious alacrity. The wedding is next month—the cause of the festivities of which I spoke but now. I may be misinformed, God knows ; but people tell me that my bride to be is of the number of thy blood relations.”

“ It is not so,” replied the Lady Asma. Yet it was the truth. The girl he named was her relation on the mother’s side, belonging to a clan well known in all the highlands. It wanted only this to prove the truth of the conviction, against which she long had struggled, that the pride of the Suleyhi was abased beyond recall. For long her mind refused to credit the atrocious tidings, till the Lady Alia, whose word she trusted, assured her that it was quite true, and gave the history of the match. The alliance, far from seeming shameful to the Sheykh of Akd, had been sought by him with all the eagerness that man can show. Yet that same Sheykh owed much to Ali es-Suleyhi.

Wild thoughts passed through the captive lady’s brain. A girl of noble lineage must surely shrink from degradation and dishonour in a slave’s embrace. Perhaps—and here the Lady Asma set her teeth, the while her heart beat fiercely—perhaps, if God so willed it, the fate of King Najâh might overtake his son ; the girl might be induced to poison him, the Squinter ! But even while she heaped her scorn on his deformity, she knew that, after the first shock, it might attract a girl. Even in her bitter hatred she had known at times that he was beautiful, had felt a baneful charm which she compared to that of sleek destructive creatures, leopards, wolves. She was a woman on the border of old age. A girl might well succumb to fascination. She plotted to have private conversation with the bride beforehand ; and, with revenge in view, subdued her

pride and grief of heart so far as to accept an invitation to be present at the harim ceremonies.

Each day she sent out loaves of bread to the two men from Sanaa. The maid who did the carrying reported how each slab was split asunder by the guard below. At length there came a day when the same guard, instead of looking at the bread, said : " Pass, with Allah's blessing ! " Still she waited. During a whole week the loaves were severed and examined only twice, although she sent them out each morn and evening. She felt sure that all suspicion had been laid to rest. Then she sat down to write to Al Mukarram. With pen in hand she seemed to see him there before her in his monstrous indolence, inquiring, " To what purpose ? " even when adjured to vindicate his mother's honour. Sayyidah had more of manly energy and martial fire. She should have been the boy and he the girl. But Sayyidah, with the best will in the world, was powerless against Mukarram's resolute and genial sloth. What word could she (his mother) pen to rouse the lion in him ? After much thought she wrote :

" I am with child by this squint-eyed slave. Make haste, before I am delivered, if thou wouldst avert a shame and horror which would turn the sun to blackness and efface the honour of the Arabs."

That would wake him, for he loved his mother, and had, moreover, chivalrous ideas regarding women. She thanked God for the lucky inspiration. Those words would pierce the armour of his smiling apathy as with a poisoned dart. She saw him rise and clutch his brow with eyes grown bloodshot, his great limbs suddenly informed with life.

With care she hid the little parchment in a loaf of bread between the upper and the lower crust.

" This is for Hasan ibn Fâdil," she told the handmaid, who went forth with it at once. The Lady Asma, from the window, saw the sentry take the loaf

and turn it over in his hands. Her heart stood still for fear he should detect her stratagem. But no! He nodded to the girl, and, with a laugh, carried the bread across to her two pensioners. Having seen it safely in the hands of Hasan ibn Fâdil, Asma left the lattice and for a while concerned herself with household discipline. When she looked out again the beggars were both gone, nor did they any more appear before her window.

Three days later all Zabîd was in commotion for the wedding of the Squinter with the daughter of the Sheykh of Akd. Asma, clad in festive raiment for the first time since she had been taken prisoner, went with the Lady Alia into the palace to bedeck the bride. She saw the wretched girl half-dead with terror, and whispered in her ear a word of love.

"O lady, save me, for the love of Allah! Thou art of our race. I have no friend in all this land but thee. Protect me for the love of Allah!" The victim of men's baseness clung to her.

"I am a prisoner," breathed back the Lady Asma, "a sufferer like thee. Wouldst save us both, O sweet one? I can show the way. There grows a deadly laurel in the garden. And the bridegroom will be weak for love these nights. He will drink deep of any cup which thou presentest."

"He shall pay for my dishonour with his life," replied the maiden in tones which thrilled the bosom of the outraged queen.

Returning from that visit, Asma sat a long while by the lattice, looking out. The severed heads beneath, now quite unrecognizable, smiled with her at the prospect of such swift revenge.

## XXI

It was night time. In a room profusely lighted and bedecked with flowers, whose fragrance mingling with the fumes of burning incense made the air oppressive, the bride, at last alone, waited the bridegroom's coming. She had not yet beheld him, for when, an hour ago, at the conclusion of the wedding ceremonies, he raised her veil, she had not dared to look upon his face. The women had then brought her in procession to this lighted chamber, at one end of which there was a couch with gold embroidered coverings. When left alone she flung herself upon the ground, hiding her face in the curve of one soft arm, too scared to pray.

She was a daughter of the mountains, bred to simple habits, accustomed to a wide horizon and free air. She felt suffocated and imprisoned in this crowded city, in this luxurious palace with its endless ceremonies. At the moment of departure from her highland home—the old grey tower above the village and the wady where a torrent thundered after rain—she had seen a shepherd boy leading the flocks to pasture, playing on reed pipes. The strong young figure with shirt flapping in the breeze, springing from rock to rock, came now before her eyes. The wistful music of the pipes was in her ears. Oh, would to God that she had been the bride of such an one !

She had heard her father and her brethren speak of Saïd the Squinter as a slave and negro, with intense abhorrence. They had hoped to see his head impaled upon the walls of Sanaa. Then all at once there came

a change in their remarks concerning him. This miscreant had won the day; he had surprised and slain the flower of the Suleyhi clan; all the mercenaries had deserted to his side. Her father and her brethren were alarmed; for they had earned his anger by their fervent zeal—too fervent, as they now perceived—for Ali es-Suleyhi in his day of power; their lands were far from Sanaa, near the frontier of Tehâmah; and Al Mukarram, weakened as he was, could not protect them. Then one day—black as night in memory—she heard that she was to be given to the monster to propitiate him, as people throw meat offal to a savage dog. What could she do? It was her father's order. They told her that it was to save their house from ruin; that she would be a queen, the greatest lady in Arabia. What was all that to her! The bridegroom's hands were red with blood of her relations; he was black, a slave by nature, and he squinted.

The splendours of her public entry, her reception at the palace increased her misery with homesickness. She shrank from the caresses of the throng of chattering women, and took no pleasure in the gorgeous clothes they made her wear. The only one she trusted was the Lady Asma, a victim like herself, a living witness of the bridegroom's monstrous cruelty. She had heard that lady's whisper with a thrill of hope. The plan of vengeance had restored her self-respect. But now, as she lay on the thick carpet in the bridal chamber, she had lost all sense of purpose as of power. Yet her despair was mixed with curiosity, which she hated as a personal defilement, but could not control. Her whole body tingled with excitement; her forehead ached; dry sobs convulsed her throat, her bosom panted. In her ears there was the warble of reed-pipes. Somewhere within her mind, a great way off, minute and glistening like a scene reflected in a tear, there moved

a shepherd lad, with shirt blown backward by the breeze and head erect, upon the mountains of pure air and liberty.

Her heart stood still, and then beat furiously, destroying every vision of the mind. Some one else was in the room. That squinting ghoul had come to claim his human sacrifice. And there was none to help her. She expected to be seized. Instead, a sweet voice said in coaxing tones :

“What? Frightened, O my dove? Have they alarmed thee? Have they told thee that I am an eater of young girls? Nothing is further from the truth, by Allah. Have no fear; for, by my life, I am as shy as thou art at this moment.”

She neither stirred nor spoke, but lay quite still upon the ground, all ears in her amazement at his tone of voice. Was that the voice of her oppressor, of the bloodstained monster who had butchered her relations and now sought her shame?

“This room is stifling. Fire consume those women! They have made it unendurable with flowers and perfumes. I must have air to breathe, and so still more must thou, O my gazelle from the high mountains, with large frightened eyes.”

“Thou canst not see my eyes.”

She heard the grudging words as if they had been spoken by some other person. She had not meant to answer him at all. The relief of finding him more gentle than she had expected, had relaxed her nerves. The music of the shepherd's pipes recurred to her; she saw again the flocks along the mountain-side; a sea of memories rose suddenly to overwhelm her. She dissolved in tears.

The bridegroom strode across the room and flung apart the wooden doors which closed a window. She heard them bang against the outer wall, and soon was conscious of a purer air.

That done, he came and sat upon the floor beside her, talking in the same melodious tones of love and reverence. He told her that he had more cause to be afraid of her than she of him, for since he had beheld her loveliness an hour ago, his life and happiness were altogether at her mercy. A smile would bid him live, a frown would kill him. He called her queen of beauty, spring of life and food of hearts, and that in thrilling tones of most complete sincerity—the tones of an appealing comrade, not a tyrant; and she had never listened to such speech before. Her sobs abated. He compared her beauty and its influence upon him to the stars, bidding her look at them for they were winking at her through the window. She raised her head and looked towards the window, then stole a glance at him. He squinted. What a hideous deformity! Again she hid her face in her arm. And once again the sweet voice reassured her, discoursing freely, happily, as might a man who meets a well-loved sister after years of separation. Never had she heard such eloquence from any mortal.

Again she stole a glance at him. He squinted, he was nearly black, and yet his face was far from disagreeable. When seen in profile as he looked out of the window, it had even beauty. Dark though he was, his presence gave a sense of light.

He must have guessed her thought, for he recited :

“ ‘ What though they blame my blackness, 'tis my glory !  
I am a hero of the seed of Ham.  
My heart is firmer than the roots of mountains,  
My fame pervasive as the smell of musk.  
My pleasure is in hunting the wild lion,  
The beast of prey I visit in his den.  
Yet all the while a gentle fawn has snared me,  
A heifer from the pastures of Khazâm.’ ”

“ Those are the words of Antar—the greatest poet and the greatest lover of Arabia—a black man ; that is why I love his poetry above all other. He loved a

noble daughter of the Arabs, just as I do, and in the end by truth and bravery, he overcame her first repugnance to his blackness."

"He was her cousin on the father's side: that made a difference," said Sâlihah reflectively.

"Ha, ha! O perfect daughter of the Arabs!" chuckled Saïd. "I warrant that thy thoughts are all of genealogy."

Again she hid her face; but when he raised her gently she made no resistance. Her fear had given place to the extreme of shyness, an inward trepidation which made speech impossible. He led her to the open window. The flowers of heaven bloomed and glistened in their azure field. He pointed out to her one star of greenish ray.

"It shone," he said, "like that upon the night when I was born, and also on the night when I set out with seventy men, unarmed except with palm-sticks, against the mighty host of the Suleyhi. It shines to-night, and will for ten nights more. Then for a while it will be no more seen."

"How couldst thou brave it?" she exclaimed in horror. "With seventy ill-armed men! Against so many thousands! Hast thou, then, no fear?"

"Fear is known to all men, yet on that occasion, conscious of the justice of my cause, fear came not near me. I was in an ecstasy. By Allah, I can still recall the very outline of the hills around that mosque and well. The night before God gave us victory, my star was on the shoulder of the highest of them. I lay and watched it many minutes ere I fell asleep."

"Thou didst slaughter the most honoured of the Arabs more like a butcher than a noble warrior, they say!" she dared reproach him.

"What words are these from my beloved, from my life's companion?"

"They were my relations."



"In surrendering my life to thee, in pressing this dear hand upon my brow, do I not make atonement?"

"That is foolishness."

"Then, since thou takest me to task thus earnestly, I must tell thee the whole history of my race."

Briefly he told the story of his father's death, his brother's suicide, the flight to Dahlak, and the years of exile; and then at greater length described the dangers of the road from Aden, the months of hiding in Zabīd, the ceaseless plotting, the hopes, the disappointments and the final triumph. Sâlihah was transported by his eloquence, bewildered and confused by the respect he gave to her opinion. Her father had commanded or ignored, her mother scolded, her; her brothers never told her anything of their affairs. The tone of comradeship, of perfect confidence, was something new. When he had told his story he inquired: "Dost thou still blame me?"

And she answered: "No," not knowing what she said.

She found herself confiding to him her own secret thoughts, describing the old tower above the wady, the village and the people of her clan; informing him how homesick she had been an hour ago, and what a horrid monster she had pictured him to be. She could look him in the face now without terror, but only a delicious shame which made it hard to do so.

His voice grew lower; he used words which lighted up the world for her by flashes like the lighting of her native hills. He took her gently in his arms and she clung fast to him. Anguish she knew, but also wild delight, transcending all her dreams of earthly bliss. His voice was music in her ears through all the night, the music of reed-pipes played by a shepherd of the hills—the perfect lover.

For several days she kept her own apartments,

refusing to see any visitors. And then the world broke in on her once more.

Among the first who came to compliment her was the Lady Asma with an eager question in her eyes ; who seized the two hands of the bride and stared at her. Sâlihah was ashamed.

“ O Allah, pity ! ” Asma whispered fiercely. “ Bewitched ! Won over by a guileful tongue ! Knowest thou not, poor fool, that all the children of Najâh are poets born ? ”

‘ They give thee with their tongue’s tip sweetness  
And then betray thee as the fox betrays.’

Saïd, squint-eyed though he is, has boasted that in an hour of conversation he could change a woman full of hatred for him to his ardent lover. And the same speech is reported of Jeyyâsh his brother. God knows they lie, for there are noble women. It grieves my soul to see a high-born daughter of the Arabs caught in the net of a designing slave.”

“ Be silent, O unhappy woman ! ” cried the wife of Saïd with indignation. “ My lord has used thee with unheard-of kindness. Thou art here more honourably housed and served than ever in thy life before. Thou art ungrateful ! ”

“ Ungrateful ? I ! My whole life, since I came here, is a studied insult.”

“ Humble thyself, and he will let thee go.”

“ God humble thee, O child of unclean birth ! ” exclaimed the Lady Asma in a royal rage. “ I wished to save thee from a shame far worse than death for any freeborn daughter of the Arabs, and lo ! thou art the willing tool of the oppressor. Thou mockest my misfortunes. In sh’Allah, thou thyself shalt drain the cup I drink—aye, to the dregs—thou and thy squinting negro. My son has raised the clans. He marches to my rescue. Wait but a little and thy loved one’s head

shall be set up against thy window, as my lord's at mine ! ”

“ If Allah wills misfortune to my lord, I pray to share it even to the death,” replied the bride with dignity. “ As for Al Mukarram and his army, they say that he has raised three thousand men, but cannot hold them. They leave his camp by fifties every day, denouncing the foolhardiness of his adventure. What can they do against the armies of my lord ? ”

“ What thy lord did against the hosts of my lord Ali ! ”

“ God forbid ! ” said Sâlihah.

“ God grant it ! ” cried the Lady Asma with vindictive fire. She then retired with hands pressed to her heart. The angry scene ending with news so welcome brought her near to fainting ; for she had had no knowledge that Mukarram was in arms on her behalf until she heard the tidings from the wife of Saïd.

## XXII

FROM the window of his chamber high up in the castle-keep at Sanaa, Abu Dad once more beheld the glow of watchfires through the night. But they now burned on the parade-ground close beneath the castle walls ; ten months before their points of flame had starred the desert hills beyond the corn-plain ; the might of the Suleyhi had so shrunken in the interval.

He had been waiting near a year for leave to go in peace, to turn his back upon the life of courts for ever. But Al Mukarram kept him, taking pleasure in his conversation more than in that of any other person. So, having made arrangements for his wife to sojourn near him in the city, where he could behold her every day, Abu Dad lingered on ; not all unwillingly, for he was sorry for the prince and longed to comfort him.

On his arrival he had met a welcome far beyond his hopes. The written testimony of Jeyyâsh and Saïd, which he carried, allayed the fierce suspicions even of the Lady Sayyidah. Mukarram loved to talk alone with him, making him tell again the story of Al Mahjam.

" Would God I had been there and died with them ! " he would suspire, face hidden in his hands.

The lord of Sanaa showed no lust of vengeance. The slaughter of his father, of his kinsfolk, was from God. The only point which seemed to rankle in his mind was the detention of his mother in Zabîd. He bit his fingers when he spoke of it.

"In sh'Allah, she is safe from actual insult ! They will not maltreat her ? " he would groan inquiringly. And Abu Dad would reassure him :

"Have no fear ! The sons of Najâh . . . reverent to women. Her captivity is but a stroke of pride at pride. Before I left Zabîd it was the common talk that she was housed and treated as becomes a queen."

"Yet at her lattice is my father's head ! "

"True. May Allah comfort her—unhappy lady ! "

"We have emissaries in Zabîd, who watch that lattice day and night. Yet they have not been able to get speech of her."

"No doubt but she is closely guarded," sighed the jester.

"Men say that we should hasten to her rescue with the few retainers who adhere to us. I cannot see the sense of that—may God forgive me, if I err in judgment ! It seems to me that it would be to throw away the force we still possess. How can I call upon the clans to rise for an adventure which concerns our honour only, and besides is desperate ? "

"That is true, may Allah guide thee ! " murmured Abu Dad.

"Allah knows to what extent my soul hates violence," the prince said often. "Thou thinkest likewise ; that is why I love thee. Thy Squinter is a monster, whom may God destroy ! Not so Jeyyâsh his brother. One could deal with him. With such a man as ruler of Zabîd, I could be well content with this small realm of Sanaa. I cannot live in the same world with Saïd the Squinter."

In truth Mukarram knew no peace of mind. He sought distraction in the crowd of courtiers, in the chase and all his usual pastimes, but in vain ; and ever he returned to talk with Abu Dad. The people shrugged their shoulders in contempt of his mean spirit which quietly accepted the most deadly insults.

“ He is not mean-spirited,” cried Abu Dad on one occasion, when his companion made herself the mouth-piece of the common gossip. “ It is only that his heart is kind, and underneath his cloak of carelessness he hides the feelings of an earnest Muslim.”

Indeed, the lord of Sanaa and high chieftain of the Arabs had this in common with the humble jester : that he was by constitution much more sensitive than the majority of men, and tried by sport and laughter to benumb the wounds which he received from life. His anger, when aroused, was so extreme, so painful to himself, so dangerous to others ; his sympathy, when unobscured, was so intense for all who suffered, that he dreaded its excitement as men dread the plague. The love and sympathy of Abu Dad for the good-natured prince were mixed with admiration as he knew him better. The jester put forth all his powers of entertainment to soothe a noble mind so sorelywounded, and at times, for half a night, succeeded in restoring to the court its former gaiety. And strange to say, but little envy was aroused by his success. The prince was now regarded merely as the idle consort of the Lady Sayyidah. Men anxious for preferment had recourse to her, and she was known to look on Abu Dad with some contempt.

The Lady Sayyidah was busily engaged in an endeavour once more to draw together the disordered units of the highland realm. All the outlying peoples had proclaimed their independence, seizing the forts entrusted to their care, and many of the nearer clans employed a tone in council which they would not have dared to use to Ali es-Suleyhi. Did she make war upon them or rebuke them publicly, they would, she knew, become allies of Saïd the Squinter. Besides, Mukarram was averse to war ; and though he took no part in her intrigues, he could have paralysed them by a single word of disapproval.

Therefore while acknowledging the new position of the clans and paying to them the consideration which they claimed, she strove to bind them to the lord of Sanaa by affection and the tie of common interest. By such means, she considered, might the influence of the Suleyhi be restored and made as strong as ever. Her renown for wisdom and impartial judgment helped this policy, for the tribes were daily quarrelling among themselves ; and so, still more, did her great beauty and her charm of manner, rousing their chivalry by deft suggestion of her perfect helplessness—a woman at the nadir of misfortune, with a useless husband.

Mukarram spoke with praise of her astuteness.

“ By Allah, she is clever ! ” he would say. “ And I know well the end to which her efforts are directed. She will gather by alliance a great army, and then will try to force me to make war upon Zabîd. They speak of girls as mild and over-sensitive. This girl is altogether without feeling for the life of others. She, like thy Squinter, would indulge in wholesale butchery, to serve her purpose, without the slightest hesitation or remorse. What is thy thought, O Abu Dad ? Are not men in general the more tender-hearted ? ”

“ It sometimes happens so, O monarch of the age.”

The jester had this favour with the prince until a certain evening when, returning from his private lodging in the town, he found the castle in commotion. As he crossed the yard a man in armour, lance erect and battle-axe across his saddle, was just riding forth, a parchment on his lance’s point—a messenger. Slaves were running to and fro. Horses, led out from the stables, pranced and whinnied. Abu Dad asked a passing steward what had happened.

“ News from the Lady Asma ! ”

“ Good, in sh’Allah ! ”

“ The worst that can be, and a word of war ! ”

The jester hastened to the prince’s rooms. He was

refused admittance. Ten minutes later he was summoned thither by an urgent message. He found Mukarram pacing to and fro, with face distorted.

"Is it thou, O Abu Dad?" he panted. "Take that letter! Read it—judge of it!"

Abu Dad read the letter of the Lady Asma, "I am with child by this squint-eyed slave," and stood aghast.

"Well, what sayest thou?" cried Al Mukarram savagely. "Hast thou not told me here a hundred times that no son of Najâh would ever wrong a woman?"

"True, I said so, O my lord."

"What sayest now?"

"By God Most High, I think the lady has invented this to rouse thy pride."

The next thing that he knew he had been lifted off his feet and flung out through the open door on to the pavement of the courtyard, where he lay half-stunned. The grooms and servants ran away; none dared approach him, till the prince himself gave orders that he should be carried to his room.

There, after what seemed hours of pain, a servant brought his supper to him. "By order of my lord," he said, "who questions of thy health. May Allah heal thee! This sudden waking of the king is like an earthquake. Everything is overthrown. The Lady Sayyidah is now a woman. She cowers, cringes, saying: 'Pray, my lord! In mercy, O delight of my existence!' He treats her as the smallest of his secretaries. He has grasp of all things. His messengers have ridden forth north, south and east, summoning all who have at heart the honour of the Arabs to raise their strength at once and come to Sanaa. None ever saw the king like this before. None knew his majesty. Some grievous outrage to the Lady Asma must have stung his soul, but none have knowledge of it



save, perchance, the councillors. Canst thou inform us ? ”

“ Not I, by Allah ! ” answered Abu Dad.

A leech came to him by the prince's order. It was two days ere he could walk without much pain. He sent to Al Mukarram, craving humbly for permission to depart from Sanaa, since he had unwillingly been guilty of such great offence. The king made answer : “ Wait for my command ! ” Through his window he could hear the blare of horns by day, could see by night the glow of camp fires on the wide meydân extending as the Arab cavalry came in by troops. Festivities were going forward in the castle for the entertainment of the chiefs. He had no part in them ; and might have thought himself forgotten except that meals were brought to him at stated hours, and once, when he wanted to go forth to see his wife in the town, he was turned back at the gate with the one word, “ Forbidden.”

At length he got the dreaded summons to Mukarram's presence. It had been a day of rain from the dawn onward, striking depression to his very bones. But now the sky was clearing. He gave praise to Allah and went down to the king as to his death. He found Mukarram in full armour, a majestic figure.

“ How is thy health, O rash one ? ” was his greeting. “ By Allah, I was half afraid lest I had killed thee. How couldst thou say it ? Think ! It is my mother—the most honourable and sincere of women ! God knows the anguish which thy words have caused me ; they work like poison in my brain at night.”

He paced to and fro the room, and then proceeded in a calmer tone :

“ I would not see thee while my anger lasted ; I would not look upon thee till I could say to thee, without rage : ‘ Thou art a liar ! ’ So great a liar that I cannot bear thy company. Yet, for the sake

of our past friendship, I will not humiliate thee. I command thee to ride forth with me to the meydân, whither I go now to review the troops. Thus men will not be saying that I drove thee forth in anger when, to-morrow, thou art no more to be found in Sanaa."

Ten minutes later Abu Dad, on horseback, was riding through the narrow city streets in the king's train. Out on the meydân the sunshine gleamed upon the trodden earth still wet with rain, and glistened upon blades of grass and leaves of trees. The distant mountains had a rainbow edge beneath a sky washed clean and of surpassing brilliance.

Troop after troop the Arab horsemen passed before Mukarram, displaying their dexterity with sword and spear. Then they lined up, and he addressed them, saying :

"Hear my words, O Arab nobles ! The cause for which I ask your succour is my quarrel ; it concerns my honour first, though Allah knows it may be said to touch the honour of the Arabs generally. It entails an expedition of great danger—but for the hope of Allah's mercy, I should call it desperate. Death and defeat are far more probable rewards than life and victory for all who follow me in this adventure. In the event of victory my helpers share the spoils on equal terms with me ; in the event of defeat, our cause is righteous and the Lord is merciful. Let all who feel the slightest hesitation or reluctance return to their own homes in safety and without reproach from me or mine. Allah forbid that I should lead to death unwilling men."

Abu Dad heard a courtier whisper : " He is mad. Two hundred men forsook him yesterday."

Another answered : " Nay, by Allah, he is wise, for he prefers a handful of whole-hearted followers to a multitude of the irresolute."

The jester had no further word with Al Mukarram.

He returned to the castle only to collect his few belongings—his lute, a book of jokes, a change of raiment—and then went to his lodgings in the town. At dawn upon the morrow he set out from Sanaa, himself on foot leading an ass on which the woman, his companion, sat atop of all their worldly goods. The air was sweet and cool after the rain. His soul rejoiced to think that he had done with courts. He had in mind a village he had passed with Saïd when flying from Ta'izz—a peaceful spot. There he designed to end his days, with God's consent.

## XXIII

SOME two hours' journey from Zabîd in the direction of the mountains stood a lonely mosque. It was frequented for a fortnight in the month of Rajab, but for the remainder of the year was little visited. Hither the Sheykh Muhammad ibn Uleyya of Zabîd, a man of learning and still greater piety, was accustomed to retire from the discussions of the theologians, spending whole weeks in contemplation of the round of day and night, the pageant of the heavens casting light and shade upon the earth. He thought with praise of the Eternal Giver, Who takes nothing in return. At times of rest he saw God's mercy as a boundless sea in evening sunshine, on which man's life was floating like a little boat of which the inmates were at strife. At times of fervour he had visions of a core of light too bright to look upon, for ever gushing over like a fountain, wave on wave. The evil in men's destiny appeared to him, at such a moment, as mere shadow, by which alone the soul of man, restricted as it is by God's decree, has knowledge of the light. For he was wont to argue that the thing uncontradicted is not for the human understanding. He that had never known a calm would have no name for wind, nor any knowledge that a wind was blowing, and so forth. All qualities, perceptions, states with us are relative; with God, absolute. No man therefore can comprehend God, nor apprehend the nature of the mystery save by His grace.

Possessing the whole of the Corân by heart, he studied it, page by page, in his own mind, and while the verses which he fully understood gave comfort to him, it was the mystic passages which most attracted his intelligence. For example: "God is the light of heaven and of earth. The similitude of his light is as a niche wherein is a lamp. The lamp is in a glass; the glass is like a brilliant star. This lamp is kindled from a blessed tree—an olive neither of the East nor of the West, whose oil would almost shine forth of itself, though no fire touched it. Light upon light. God leads to His light whom He will, and God speaks in parables to men, for God is all-knowing."

He was musing on this passage in the darkness, pausing for a moment in his recitation of the whole Corân. In a niche before him was just such a lamp, enclosed in glass, and it was going out. Shadows leapt and fell upon the pillars near, and on the figure of the Sheykh upon his prayer-mat.

It was a Friday morning, near the dawn. Upon the day before, a succession of groups composed of frightened country people leading beasts of burden, had passed by the mosque; and each and all had cried to him: "The mountaineers are coming. Fly with us into Zabîd." But he had answered only: "I put trust in God." At sunset, standing in the gateway, he had seen the undulating country empty save for scampering of conies and the flutter of rock-pigeons, and had given praise to Allah for the growth of solitude. That peaceful night he dedicated to a khitmah, which means a perfect recitation of the book of God; and he had performed three-quarters of his pious task when the light in the niche began to waver. He sat still and watched it. At one moment the vaulting overhead, the pillars and the gloom of distant aisles, were visible; the next the mosque was dark. The glass alone held, as it seemed, an ember. That too died.

“And there all likeness ends,” he said within himself. “The lamp which typifies the light of God, dimly perceived amid the shadows of created things, never expires. . . . ‘Light upon light’ ! . . . Many are the renderings I know, but none contents me. The meaning stands beside me, like an angel smiling, yet I cannot see.”

He glanced behind him at the doorway and beheld a line of whiteness on the far horizon, underneath the stars. The day was coming. He resumed his chanting at the words :

“By the heavens which contain the mansions of the stars . . .”

Of a sudden he was startled by the thunder of a horse’s hoofs. He looked round and beheld a monstrous horse, a monstrous rider, at the doorway—the horse as big as a camel, the rider’s spear as thick and lofty as a minaret, or so it seemed to his alarm in the uncertain light. He deemed the apparition an archangel ; or else, perhaps, El Khidr, upon whom be peace.

The knight dismounted, leaned his spear against the wall and strode to where the Sheykh Muhammad sat.

“I heard thee chanting,” he remarked in hollow tones. “Continue, I beseech thee, and conclude the chapter.”

The Sheykh Muhammad did as he was told. When he had made an end, the apparition ordered : “Pray !” The Sheykh intoned a prayer to which the stranger said “Amen.” The Sheykh began another, but he soon became aware that the stranger was no longer listening. He had gone back to the doorway, whither Sheykh Muhammad, his petition ended, followed him. By then the light had grown. From every fold and crevice of the land came troops of horsemen, all converging on Tureybah, as the higher ground where the

mosque stood was called. Troop after troop rode up before the gateway and, saluting with their spears, exclaimed :

“ God give thee comfort of this day, O sovereign lord ! ”

The stranger answered : “ Welcome, noble Arabs ! ”

Then certain of the chiefs dismounted and came through the doorway. Among them the Sheykh fancied that he recognized the figure and the voice of Asaad ibn Shihâb, the man who had been governor of the Tehâmah under Ali es-Suleyhi ; but could not be sure, for they were all in armour. The daylight had dispelled his superstitious awe. He knew now that he had to do with men, not jinn nor angels. But his wonder was the greater when he looked upon the spear which leaned against the wall beside the gate, and felt it with his hand. The shaft consisted of a huge bamboo, weighted and ringed with iron, beyond the strength of common men to wield. The man whom he had seemed to recognize happened to turn towards him with his visor up. His face was clearly visible. It was indeed no other than the former viceroy of Zabîd, the brother of the Lady Asma.

The Sheykh Muhammad ventured to accost him, saying :

“ In kindness, O my lord, inform me : Who are these ? ”

“ That,” was the reply, “ is the high chief of the Arabs, the heroic Al Mukarram Ahmad, son of Ali es-Suleyhi ; and that is Al Karam the Yamite ; and that is Aâmir ez-Zawâhi, the most generous Arab who ever mounted horse ; and that is my paternal uncle, paternal uncle also of the captive queen, the Lady Asma.”

The Sheykh Muhammad, thus enlightened, withdrew into the dim recesses of the mosque, from whence he watched their council not without some lingering

trace of fear. Al Mukarram Ahmad, after consultation with his chiefs, stood out before the gate and thus addressed the host :

“ O true believers, if your resolutions had been newly made, I should have tried to sharpen them. But to-day I am not minded to repeat the words which you heard from me yesterday and in the days before. I urged you to return while yet the distance from your homes allowed of it. To-day the choice is with your enemy. You have thrust yourselves into the lion's den. Choose between death and the disgrace of unavailing flight.”

He added these two lines of poetry :

“ I go down, with my sword in hand, to waters  
Whence none return save by the force of arms.”

“ That is from Abi't-tayyib el Mutanabbi,” said the Sheykh Muhammad to himself, “ the Muslim poet best beloved of warriors.”

Mukarram then appointed Asaad ibn Shihâb, the brother of the Lady Asma, to the command of the right, and her uncle, an old man, to the command of the left, wing, openly in the hearing of the army ; for he said :

“ You two are not divided from me in this matter, seeing my mother, whom we go to rescue, is your next of kin. I myself shall lead the centre. We three have no care for our lives this day.”

There were cries of satisfaction and devotion from the troopers. And then the leaders got to horse again, the host moved off.

In half an hour the scene around the mosque of et-Tureybah was solitary as before their coming, the silence broken only by the cry of birds. The Sheykh Muhammad was once more at his devotions. But the interruption had destroyed his peace of mind. Thoughts of this low world, and what was taking



place there intruded on his higher meditations. He strained his eyes and ears in the direction of Zabīd as if his efforts could dispel the veil of distance. His sons and daughters with their families were in the city. He could not but feel anxious upon their account. The peace of mind required for meditation was no longer his; the solitude had lost its mystic power. He resolved to take his staff and walk back to Zabīd as soon as the day's heat abated; and then rubbed his eyes, half ready to believe that Al Mukarram and his army existed only in his dreaming brain. The hoof-prints in the sand, however, were convincing evidence. Still the impression left upon his mind was of a vision of the night, a warning rather than a real occurrence. It was marvellously clear, and gained importance from the course of subsequent events. He told the story often and so vividly that those who heard remembered and retold it, with the result that it has been preserved in written history until to-day.

The servile army of Zabīd at Saīd's disposal is said to have numbered twenty thousand men. If we suppose that nearly half these troops had been detached to intercept the host of Al Mukarram—who, by good service of his Arab scouts, was able to elude them in the night—the force which still remained to guard the city must have seemed overwhelming to the sixteen hundred Arab horsemen who advanced against it. They knew, moreover, that a second hostile army lay between them and the mountains, cutting off retreat. But Al Mukarram and his uncles were quite undismayed. Indeed, they did not place their hope in victory, but in the slaughter of such numbers of the Ethiopians as should make them rue their treatment of the Lady Asma for long years to come.

The armies met upon the open ground beyond the palm-groves, where corn waved in the spring, but

which was now as desert. A crowd had come out from the town to watch the fight. The more adventurous of these spectators, men and boys, swarmed up the nearer palm trees and hung amid their plumes like larger fruit.

Mukarram did not stop to plan or parley. At sight of the Abyssinian army drawn up on a line of vantage, he gave the word, and every lance was laid in rest, the spurs were pressed to every horse's flank. With a sound like distant thunder, the charge went straight for the opposing ranks despite a hail of arrows and some falls; nor when the battle was once joined did any of the Arabs seek relief from it. From thenceforth it was fighting hand to hand, in the breath of the foe; it was killing, chest to chest, and eye to eye. Man after man went down before Mukarram, whose weight and reach of arm made him invincible. His people, fired by his example, fought with rage; but still, after an hour of ceaseless striving, the Abyssinian army held its ground. Saïd the king was in its midst inspiring faith and courage.

Mukarram felt fatigue. His arms grew numb. He had resigned himself to ultimate defeat when lo, a miracle! The ranks opposed to him were thrown into confusion; there were cries of anger and despair. The two wings of the Abyssinian army had been driven in upon the centre which, though strong against Mukarram's pressure and in sight of victory, was shaken by the frantic struggles of the fugitives who cried out, to excuse their cowardice, that all was lost. Mukarram gave a mighty shout. His people rallied; and the Abyssinians were soon running helter-skelter to Zabîd, struggling in their hurry with the townsfolk, who, secure of victory, had sauntered out to see the fight.

The slaughter at the city gates lasted till noon. The resistance there encountered was rather that of

men wedged in a solid mass in the attempt to enter, than of soldiers ; though some serious fight was made, in order to enable Saïd and his household with part of the defeated army to remove the royal treasure and get clear away. This purpose was accomplished by the fifth hour of the day, and a little after noon the Arabs rode into Zabîd.

## XXIV

THE Lady Asma had arisen at the dawn as was her custom always, and after washing in cold water, poured upon her by a slave-girl, had spent a longer time than usual at her prayers. Saïd, when visiting her upon the day before, had told her of Mukarram's raid into the lowlands: "He started with three thousand men but, ere he reached the confines of Tehâmah, quite half that number had forsaken him. Before he sees the palm trees of Zabîd he may be all alone, yet he will hasten on, fulfilling God's decree upon him. Of those who leave him after entering the plain it seems improbable that any will escape destruction; for some thousands of our troops, making a circuit, passed his army in the darkness of last night, and now lie between him and the mountains, cutting off retreat. The lion in his noble rage esteems himself the lord of destiny, even after his enclosure in the hunter's net."

The thought of the small Arab army thus entrapped and threatened with extermination had kept her wide awake through all the hours of darkness. Her morning prayer was the expression of her anguish of the night. God was greater than the kings and armies of the world. If He pleased He could give victory to Al Mukarram and his band of heroes over all the slavish legions of Tehâmah. If He pleased, she might be rescued. But in her heart she had despaired of that event. Her prayer was that Mukarram might exact a price for his destruction so great that the house

of Najāh would mourn the day that ever they imprisoned her, the Queen of Yaman ; that he might kill at least some hundreds of the black-skinned swine ; and, oh ! if Allah willed !—that he might slaughter Saïd the Squint-eyed, her tormentor, and hew his hateful body limb from limb. Then Sâlihah would know the anguish she herself had borne. Her ultimate, extremest hate was now for Sâlihah—the girl of her own kindred who had dared to flout her, who had become the willing plaything of her house's foe.

From prayer she passed into a gloomy reverie, from which she was aroused by blare of horns and beat of drums. One of her maidens told her that the troops were marching forth to fight. Her heart leapt at the news. So Al Mukarram was not yet annihilated. He was before Zabîd, and with a force sufficient for set battle. She hastened to the lattice. Crowds were passing in the street, all going in the same direction, towards the Highland Gate. All the faces appeared gay and smiling, confident of victory.

A servant came to her with further tidings :

“ The Amîr Mukarram is but one hour distant. But, alas ! they say his army is so small that it will be swallowed in a minute by the hosts of Saïd. They hasten forth to see the slaughter of our heroes. Woe the day ! ”

“ Allah is greater ! ” said the Lady Asma.

Soon the street was empty. A strange hush was on the city, usually full of noises at that hour. Even the bread-sellers had gone out to see the sport, leaving their trays, a pile of them, in charge of the sentries who stood guard before her prison. Pigeons fluttered white upon the roofs and pavement, or wheeled above like specks of shadow in the sun-rays. The sunlight had already found the palace square ; it lay there as pure gold by contrast with the morning shade which filled the alleys.

Inside the room, behind the Lady Asma, whose face was pressed against the lattice, all her household had assembled. The fate of every one of them was bound to hers inseparably, and instinct made them seek her presence in that hour. They spoke together in low tones, while one, a eunuch famed for piety, recited the Corân concerning death and judgment. The Lady Asma seemed unconscious of their presence.

After an hour there was a noise of running in the palace square, a shout of victory, followed in a minute by the women's joy-cries—Sâlihah and her crowd of flatterers exulting, thought the captive bitterly; might Allah turn their exultation into blackest woe! Then quiet once more held the city—as it seemed, for hours. And then there came a noise of running, this time multitudinous, a confusion of loud cries of which she could not tell the meaning. Of a sudden she felt faint, her brain was reeling. What was that they were crying in the street? "The wings are driven in: the heart is broken! It is defeat complete and irretrievable!" Of which host did they speak? She strained her ears and eyes.

Then soldiers passed her house, escorting a procession of richly furnished palanquins and many women walking closely veiled. Among the men on horseback she noticed the chief steward and other high officials of the palace known by sight to her. The curtains of the grandest litter flew apart a moment; a hand and arm as fair as alabaster were thrust forth to draw them back, and Asma caught a glimpse of the fair face she loathed.

Could Sâlihah be going out to greet her lover, who returned victorious? No, for the procession headed towards the seaward gate, and many of the escort carried burdens or led baggage-animals. It was flight.

Exultation took possession of the Lady Asma. The space of bare white wall, the hurrying forms, the

blue sky overhead dilated and contracted to her vision, seeming to leap and fall. She expected that the Abyssinian slaves would butcher her and her attendants ere they fled ; yet she rejoiced, since Saïd was defeated—slain, she hoped ; and Sâlihah was fleeing for her life. Her husband's death, her long imprisonment, were well avenged.

Yet even in that moment of elation her mind took note of the behaviour of the fighting slaves to Sâlihah and contrasted it with their behaviour towards herself upon a like occasion. The Squinter was himself a slave by origin ; that doubtless was the cause of their fidelity. She sneered and shrugged.

Her prison was no longer guarded ; but the desertion of the sentries was no blessing, since the door was now an invitation to flying soldiers or an angry mob. She sent a servant down to bolt the door. No sooner had he done so than it was assailed with furious blows. The slave-girls flung themselves upon the ground in terror.

The Lady Asma turned and spoke to them.

"Hear," she said, "what they are crying in the street. All fear is past, the praise to Allah. Cease weeping, O my children ! Come, look and listen ! We are well avenged."

A crowd of men, women, and children from the neighbouring quarter stood below, some stretching up their hands in wild entreaty, some knocking at the massive door with all their might.

"In thy protection, O most gracious lady !"—"We beseech thee, shield us !"—"We are people who have done no wrong to anybody !"—"For Allah's mercy, give us refuge in thy house !"

The lady opened a small wicket in the lattice, and showed her face to them. Their cries increased. She laughed at their despair. One of her handmaids, mad with the relief from deadly terror, shouted : "O children

of abomination, in sh'Allah you will all be speared, your women ravished, your children roasted living in your sight."

The shouts grew frenzied :

"What evil have we done? Name it, O gracious lady!"—"Have we, poor slaves of God, done any wrong?"

Just then arose a warning cry which caused a quick dispersal of the crowd. Men and women ran to the wall; children, falling, were dragged along upon their bellies, by one arm. A knight in armour rode full tilt across the palace square and at the street-end reined his horse and looked about him; then he proceeded slowly to the mansion of the severed heads. Two other horsemen followed at full gallop, overtaking him as he drew up beneath the lattice from which the Lady Asma leaned intent.

He cried: "May God perpetuate your honour, sovereign lady!" His two companions proffered the same greeting each in turn. She replied in each case:

"Welcome, noble Arab!"

She then inquired of the first rider: "What is thy name?"

"My name," he said, "is Ahmad son of Ali son of Muhammad."

"Among the Arabs there are many Ahmads sons of Ali. Have the goodness to disclose thy face to me."

The knight pushed up his visor. She exclaimed with pride: "Welcome to thee, O our sovereign lord Mukarram! Who are thy companions?"

"This, upon my right, is Al Karam the Yamite, and this, upon my left, is Aâmir Ez-Zawâhi."

"Upon Al Karam I bestow the revenues from Aden for the present year; to Aâmir I assign the fortresses of Kaukabân and Jaubân, with jurisdiction over all their territories. The grants are near of equal value, as I think."



From the moment he drew up beneath her window Mukarram's gaze had never left his mother's face. Something about her looks and way of speaking made him wonder. He now asked :

"Come we in time to save our house from open shame? When is the period of which thou spakest in thy letter?"

The queen laughed out, exclaiming :

"That, O beloved, was a stratagem. Do I not know thy pleasure-loving nature; how it requires the stinging of a swarm of hornets to rouse thee even to avenge thy mother's wrongs; yet, when aroused, thou art the hero of the age? By Allah, there was nothing of the sort I mentioned. The Squinter always used me as a queen. Couldst think I would survive so great an infamy? Not even in my youth, when life had worth!"

The men beside him praised her strategy. Mukarram sat quite still upon his horse. His eyes, no longer fixed upon her face, were wide and vacant. His whole frame seemed to have relaxed and lost vitality. It was at that moment that a draught of cool air struck him, and a shudder went through all his limbs. His mouth contracted, twitching at one side. His head began to shake involuntarily.

"Look at these piteous objects here beneath me," said his mother, pointing sternly with both hands. "This is thy father's, that thine uncle's head. Are these not a sufficient reason for thy deeds this day—these, and my long imprisonment? I ask thee!"

Mukarram drew himself together by an effort.

"Doubtless," he answered dully; and with that he shook his bridle and rode off with palsied head.

## XXV

A LITTLE later the chiefs who sat with Al Mukarram in the gateway of the royal palace, in sight of the dismounted troops which filled the square, observed the twitching of his mouth and the involuntary movements of his head with pity and amazement.

"It is a stroke of the air after the heat of great exertions clad in armour. It will pass, in sh'Allah," they explained among themselves.

But when, on somebody's remarking that the day was fortunate, a white day in the history of the human race, Mukarram gave a loud and bitter laugh, which was succeeded by strange facial contortions, they looked at one another in dismay. He noticed their concern and laughed again.

"Fear not," he cried, "I still preserve my wits, though God alone knows what has happened to the head containing them."

They hastened to console him, saying that it was but natural he should feel some illness after superhuman labours, that God would heal him shortly, and so forth. He laughed again. A bitter fiend possessed the prince whose name had been a byword for good nature.

"Now listen," he exclaimed at length when all the leaders had assembled in the gate. "You all know how these blacks betrayed my father. We have slain a few of them out yonder; many fled; but thousands still remain. The city teems with them. Give orders

that the sword be raised against them. Search through the streets and slay them where you find them. All men can tell a black face from a brown."

"Nay, O my lord," an older man objected; "it is the custom of the natives of Tehâmah—Arabs, one may call them, though degenerate—to marry Ethiopian girls. A black skin here is not a proof of slavish birth."

"True," said another; "one cannot distinguish."

"There is only one way that I know of to discriminate," said Asaad ibn Shihâb, the former governor. "There are certain letters which no Habashi pronounces right. For instance, the word '*Azm*.' They pronounce it '*Azm*.'"

"Let that word be the test," cried Al Mukarram.

"Nay, that too is inconclusive," said the first objector; "for, by the life of my head, there is no son of Adam who is not an Arab but pronounces '*Azm*' like the Habashi; and there are Indians, Persians, and Sûdânis in the city."

"No matter; it is near enough," said Al Mukarram with his evil laugh. "Send cryers with the order to the troops."

The order was received with shouts of triumph by the soldiery.

A number of the quiet people of Zabîd had gathered on the fringes of the square to gaze upon the savage warriors as they would have come to gaze upon a lion or a crocodile, or any other rarity which had been brought into the town. They stood and stared with slightly timid curiosity, giving praise to Allah who had made his creatures of such different kinds. In the front rank of this crowd of sightseers, black faces were as plentiful as brown. The Arab troopers fell upon their luckless owners, dragged them forth and slew them. Not one of them, it seemed, but answered "'Azm," or would have done had he been given time.

The harmless townsfolk fled with frightened cries, pursued at once by many of the highlanders, though some remained behind a minute to discard some piece of armour or of clothing which impeded the free movement of the limbs. The square before the palace was soon empty, save for the horses tethered round the walls and the few men who guarded them.

"Let us now go and watch the slaughter," said Mukarram to the chieftains. A few responded to his invitation; the greater number begged to be excused. The servants, watchful of their masters' faces, brought the chargers; the group of great ones mounted and rode off.

The Lady Asma was at her window when they passed beneath it, smiling as she listened to the death-shrieks which resounded far and near. Mukarram called up to her: "Ride with us, my mother, for thou lovest bloodshed, and the massacre to-day is in thy honour."

He spoke in mocking tones. His mother answered gravely:

"Praise be to Allah, I behold my son relentless!"

Mukarram's head jerked forward as he rode away, seeming to give assent although the movement was in truth spasmodic.

Along a wall lay half a dozen corpses and among them was a fearful object—a man crawling with the head half severed from his body. At that sight Mukarram yelled with rage. He drove his horse upon the wretch, drawing his sword and striking down with all his might, not once nor twice. One of his companions at length dared to seize his bridle and lead him forcibly away from the dead body, which by then had lost all semblance of humanity. For a moment that companion thought his hour had come, so fiercely did the monarch turn upon him, sword in hand.

"My lord is ill through great fatigue. Let him return and seek repose," he murmured with respect.

"Not so, by Allah," said Mukarram, his wrath expiring in a bitter laugh. "Let us go on and see the sights. Are we not men? And do not tender women like my mother and my consort dote on deeds of blood?" He laughed again; then, mastering his mad excitement, he surveyed the traces of the slaughter with dull, weary eyes.

Led by the din, they rode in single file through narrow ways and tunnels till they came to streets in which the slaughter was in actual progress. The Amîr Asaad ibn Shihâb, with his own sword, struck down an Arab whom he saw insulting a veiled woman with arms white as wax. The Amîr Karam and others kept on shouting to their people: "Keep the limits. All who transgress the limits will themselves be slain."

"What matter?" murmured Al Mukarram listlessly. "If they slaughter less or more, will it affect the measure of their guilt? That is but little, since they act upon my order." He was silent for a moment before adding: "Curse the pride of women! All this coil is for my mother's honour. She is proud."

In a covered street of shops adjacent to the mosque of Ibrahim, they saw a man no darker than the King Mukarram in complexion carrying a little black boy on his shoulder; here the Arab was the servant and the negro child the lord. The fear had not yet reached that portion of the city. The tidings of the slaughter were still disbelieved. They had already traversed half the street's length when the slayers entered it. The Abyssinian child, perched on the Arab's shoulder, was a mark for them. A group of highlanders made for him, forcing passage through the crowd by the simple expedient of thrusting daggers into all obstructing them. The Arab servant, warned

of their intention, looked about him wildly. Espying Al Mukarram close at hand, he placed the child before him on the saddle with the cry : " A trust from God ! " and then was gone.

The prince rode on, holding the child before him on his saddle-bow. Some of his men, approaching, offered to take the child and kill it. He replied :

" He is between my hands, in sanctuary."

" Mayst thou be blest in him ! " replied the slayers, smiling friendly. " By the Corân, he is a well-made boy."

About that time a whisper ran among his escort that the king was weeping. Truly he was not himself that day. The strain of fighting and anxiety had been too much for him.

At the crossing of two covered ways they saw a curious sight. The bazaar running at right angles to the one they threaded was devoted to the trade of smiths and armourers. Fires were glowing down the length of it on either hand. Some of the smiths in leather raiment held the entrance, armed with bulky hammers and other weapons of their craft. Others were heating bars of iron in their furnaces, vowing to thrust them in the face of any highlander who tried to pass. A crowd of Abyssinians had sought refuge in the street of fires, yet no one of the slayers cared for conflict with the burly smiths.

Mukarram, having been through the main thoroughfares, was returning past the mosque of Ibrahîm, when he was met by a procession of the Learned. He reined in his horse.

The foremost Sheykh, an aged man, eyed him severely, and inquired :

" Art thou the chieftain Al Mukarram Ahmad son of Ali ? "

" That is my name."

" By what right dost thou slaughter quiet people ? "

"By the right of vengeance."

"There is no such right."

"I slay the Abyssinians who betrayed and slew my father, and held my mother captive for a year."

"Did that poor woman or that infant slay thy father?" The old man pointed to two bodies lying near. "In the name of Allah, Merciful, Compassionate, answer me that question truly, O Mukarram Ahmad!"

"No; but it is customary to take vengeance widely."

"Customary with the Arabs of the Ignorance, and thou art of them," said the Sheykh with fire. "In El Islâm there are no tribes nor nationalities, nor feuds nor taking vengeance on the innocent. Canst thou call thyself a Muslim, and act thus? Thy punishment is certain, for it is denounced of God."

"Be silent, void of manners as of prudence! Enrage not one who has the power to kill! Make way, I tell thee," cried an Arab chief.

The old white-bearded Sheykh surveyed him with a face of pity; then, once more turning towards Mukarram, questioned:

"What hast thou to say?"

"Nothing," replied the monarch in a hollow tone.

"God has touched thy head this day with palsy. Take the warning and repent. Command this crime to cease."

"I do command it. You, my friends, who hear me, go through the streets and bid our men desist at once."

"Good," said the aged jurist; "but the evil done remains. The blood of all these Muslims cries for vengeance. God Himself is their Avenger."

Mukarram made no answer. With head bent down

and shaking he caressed the little negro boy upon his saddle-bow, while the procession of the Learned passed into the mosque of Ibrahîm. One of them pointed to the child in passing and said meaningly :

“ Aye, make much of him, O monarch of the age, for he represents the one good deed which thou hast done this day.”



## XXVI

THE sun was still above the horizon when the Sheykh Muhammad ibn Uleyya reached the shadow of the palm-groves, which he was surprised to find deserted at that hour. The city streets, too, when he entered them, seemed strangely empty. There were no crying salesmen at the corners and the alcoves in the markets were all shuttered up. At a street corner he beheld a heap of corpses newly slain, among them little children ; and stood staring in dismay, calling down Allah's mercy on their owners. Some men came down a tunnel with two biers. He asked to know the meaning of those bodies. They shrugged and told him :

" It is Al Mukarram. They say he has killed twenty thousand Abyssinians to content his mother, whom Saïd the Wily kept so long a prisoner. He ordered everybody with a dark skin and a foreign accent to be slain. It lasted for three hours. Good luck for thee, O Sheykh, that it has ceased. Thy skin is black, and thy pure Arabic might not have saved thee. The slayers did not pause for much inquiry."

" Allah is merciful ! " exclaimed the Sheykh Muhammad with sudden pain as of a dagger at his heart. It was true that he was half an Abyssinian ; his wife, now gone to Allah's mercy, had been also of mixed blood ; his children and his grandchildren had dark complexions. He stood and offered up his fears to God, then went his way.

From every hand, amid the unaccustomed stillness, he heard the sound of wailing, dull and ceaseless. Horns were blowing somewhere near the royal palace. Then from a score of lofty galleries the voice of the muezzins floated like the song of birds. It comforted his soul. He rendered praise to Allah, and hastened to the mosque of Ibrahim. The court was crowded. Whole families had fled there with their household treasures. Women and children crouched beneath the cloisters, or on the wide sills of the lattice windows, amid a strange display of bundles, bedclothes, pots and pans. Men thronged the open pavement in large groups, some sitting, others pacing to and fro. The Sheykh Muhammad hastened to the central fountain for ablutions, and thence into the mosque itself, where there were many worshippers. After the prayer he went again into the court and walked about among the fugitives, from whom he hoped to gather tidings of his family. While he was thus engaged, some serving-men came round with trays of food which they distributed under the direction of a learned Sheykh.

"It is the bounty of our Prince Jeyyâsh," he heard men saying. "May Allah recompense him both in this world and the other. Before he went he left a sum of money with the Ulema for the relief of those who suffered by the change of rulers."

He went on questioning the seated groups. At length one asked him in return: "Art thou perchance of kin to those of whom thou seekest tidings?"

"I am the Sheykh Muhammad ibn Uleyya."

"Then may the Lord of heaven and earth have mercy on thee; for all thy race is utterly destroyed. We are their neighbours, and their death-shrieks warned us of the danger. Every one of them is gone to Allah's mercy!"

"Nay," said a woman softly. "Who can tell? I heard it said that the small boy Abdullah was absent

with a servant of the house. God grant he has escaped to be thy solace, O thou poor bereaved one."

The Sheykh Muhammad blessed them as he moved away, with mind half stunned. That morning he had owned a family of thirty persons. Now, if that man spoke truth, he stood alone. The green branches and the flowers had been cut off by lightning ; only the scarred and useless trunk remained. " Praise be to Allah ! " he kept murmuring. " No matter what befalls, to Him be praise ! "

He went to his own house. It was deserted. A neighbour told him that the bodies from it had been taken to a common heap outside the city. He went to the dwelling of his eldest son, to hear the same tale from its sole remaining inmate, an old woman. Around the dwelling of his second son there was no sign of life. But in the approach to it lay corpses which the street dogs nuzzled, while overhead there was the flap of eager wings.

While he stood before the door, in doubt what course to take, he heard the sound of hurrying steps. Some person ran against him in the darkness and, starting back, inquired : " Who is it ? "

" It is I, the Sheykh Muhammad, O Amîn ! "

" Praise be to Allah ! I have been out to Tureybah, seeking thee."

" What of the child Abdullah, who was in thy charge ? "

" Please God he still survives. I was in the markets with him on my shoulder when I saw the slayers. They spied the little one ; his skin is black ; they ran towards us, shouting death to him. Some great ones of the Arabs were approaching. I deposited the child between the two hands of their leader with the words, ' A trust from God ' ; and then I fled. The honour of the Arabs is well known."

" It was well done," replied the Sheykh Muhammad.

"Now assist me to remove these bodies. Bring a lantern, rouse the neighbours ; summon those who wash and clothe the dead."

"To hear is to obey," replied the servant.

The pious task engrossed them for the remainder of the night and till the third hour of the following day. Returning from the cemetery at that hour the Sheykh Muhammad was surprised to notice that the city's life flowed on the same as usual. The hawkers cried their wares ; the shops were open, and dark-skinned merchants were cajoling the wild Arab warriors, their butchers of the day before, who sauntered through the streets now, hand in hand, agape at all they saw, like harmless yokels.

Repairing to his empty house, he rested until noon, when he was summoned to a meeting of the Learned in the mosque of Ibrahîm, held to decide upon the form of protest to be made against the late barbarities. It was proposed to send out letters to the Ulema of every Muslim country.

"All the four ways of thought here represented are agreed on the necessity," said the chief of the Hanafite doctors. "But some would not communicate with heretics even in such a case. What is thy opinion, O thou light of piety ?"

The Sheykh Muhammad, thus appealed to, meditated for a moment, and then said :

"The King Mukarram is himself a heretic—the representative in Yaman of the false Khalîfah. He cannot be effectively rebuked or punished save by the Learned of his own community. I suggest that we, the Learned of Zabîd—in which term I include, on this occasion, all those who hold heretical opinions—should make complaint in the first instance to the university of Cairo, which may be called the council of the false Khalîfah."

"Thy speech is wisdom," said one present. "But

the majority will be opposed to such a course, saying that it would be tantamount to an acceptance of the Obeydite pretensions; and the case is urgent." He proceeded to relate the horrors which he himself had witnessed on the day before; and in conclusion recommended nothing less than holy war by all the orthodox against the lord of Sanaa. Another speaker, no less angry at the massacre, was prepared to give some portion of the guilt to Saïd, who had provoked Mukarram by the previous slaughter at Al Mahjam. But he was interrupted:

"Saïd killed only warriors by trade, not quiet Muslims!"

"Who mourns ambitious hypocrites, who damage crops, and trample Allah's servants underfoot?"

"If Mukarram had slain only the armed slaves of Saïd!"

"Still Saïd, by his previous conduct, had provoked him!"

Many present wanted to employ the influence of all the colleges and mosques, which was immense, upon behalf of Saïd, and to stir up the quiet people to destroy the highlanders. It was then that, at the instance of the president, the Sheykh Muhammad son of Uleyya spoke his mind. He said:

"Do not confound the small, half-conscious cause with the immense result; the man Mukarram son of Ali with the horrors which we all deplore—horrors which are only lawful against utter heathens, men so obstinate and brutal as to be incapable of understanding any other argument. Even then they ought to cease at the first cry for mercy. The man Mukarram must have been demented at the moment when he gave the order for this wholesale slaughter. He is an educated man, and people speak of him as quite good-natured; I myself can testify that he is not an atheist, seeing that he prayed beside me in the mosque of Tureybah at

dawn yesterday. But like all the highland nobles he lacks that sense of universal brotherhood which is the spirit and the glory of Islâm. Pride in his family, his tribe, his race, his personal and tribal honour is the natural product of his education. To such a man the slightest outrage to his family appears a great catastrophe. To such a man the slaughter of his father, the imprisonment, though honourable, of his mother, seemed enough to sanction any measure of reprisals. He was mad with pride or nearly so ; and therefore pitiful.

“ Leave him aside, and view the recent slaughter as it strikes the Muslim brotherhood. In El Islâm, there exists neither nationality nor patriotism ; all Muslims, whether slave or free, are brethren. In the days of the Ignorance, it was nation against nation for mere pride of race—a crime or madness which persists among the infidels unto this day. The Arab clans, too, have preserved a taint of it. In El Islâm ambitious hypocrites alone contend ; and it is the duty of us Learned to see to it that they do not involve the quiet people in their sinful strife. To those who would raise up the quiet people to avenge this present wrong, and on behalf of Saïd el Ahwal, I say ‘ No ! ’ The more that are indifferent to change of rulers, so only that each ruler be a Muslim, the better for Islâm and for the world at large ; since fanatical attachment to one chieftain or one spot of ground, and hatred of another, is the cause of half the evils which afflict mankind. The quiet folk are brothers in all lands. What part have they in the contentions of the proud ?

“ Now there are two points in the recent slaughter which are sufficient of themselves to mark it impious. Men of a particular race were denounced apart from other Muslims, and slaughtered, being personally inoffensive ; and men of a certain colour were treated as inferior and deprived of all the rights of human beings, not to

speak of Muslims. If such behaviour should become a precedent, there is an end to human progress ; and all the good that has been done in these five hundred years since the coming of the Messenger (God bless and keep him) is undone. That is the case as it appears to me, and as I fain would have it stated in our letter to the Learned of Islâm."

There was a general murmur of assent when he stopped speaking. He rose to take his leave, saluting right and left. The Sheykh Salâmah, who had just arrived, detained him, saying so that all could hear :

" I have an errand to the Sheykh Muhammad from Mukarram Ahmad." Upon that name a hostile silence fell. " He holds, it seems, thy sole surviving grandson ; and he bids me ask on his behalf for thy permission to keep the child and educate him at his own expense."

" Nay," answered Sheykh Muhammad after thinking. " That would but increase the wrong, since the child is all that is now left to me of kith and kin. Yet doubtless it is kindly meant. Say to my lord that, if the boy is not a burden to him, I pray his Highness to take care of him for yet a few days more, until I can rebuild my dwelling, as a man might say."

" Thy prayer is granted. I will answer for it," said the Sheykh Salâmah, and departed quickly.

" The chosen friend and councillor of Saïd is now become the boon companion of Mukarram, and yet he wears that air of probity," remarked the president when he had gone. " But say," he added, turning to the Sheykh Muhammad, " is it true that thy whole family has been destroyed save one small boy ? "

" It is true. Praise be to Allah Who dispenses joy and grief ! "

" Then, by the Lord Most High"—the provost of the Learned smote his knee for emphasis—" thou art a miracle ! Here hast thou been preaching

moderation in persuasive tones to men who have not suffered any loss to be compared with thine. Praise be to Allah, who has let me know thee."

He flung his arms round Sheykh Muhammad's neck ; and there ensued a veritable conflict in that grave assembly, every member striving for a touch of the saint's hand. The old man made his way out slowly through the press of them, a tolerant and weary smile upon his face.

" Whither away ? " a friend inquired. " Be kind, come home with me, my house is thine. It is not well to be alone in such affliction."

" I return to et-Tureybah, to complete my month of solitude. There I am not alone," replied the saint.

And he went out through the cloistered court with a firm step.



## XXVII

THERE was relief among the followers of Al Mukarram. The king was now himself again ; the fit had passed. In place of the hero, highly strung and terrible, who had become a very devil in the hour of triumph, there sat the jovial hunter, the stout trencherman, the boon companion fond of every one who made him laugh. The strain was past, and life was once more tolerable. That was the general judgment ; but the few who loved the monarch and observed more closely, were conscious of a recklessness in his return to pleasure as if he strove to dull some inward pain. These shook their heads in private when they spoke of him. And everybody was distressed by that strange illness of his head, shown in involuntary jerks and twitchings, which defied the skill of the physicians.

On the day after the slaughter in the streets, Mukarram reinstated his maternal uncle in the post of governor and resigned to him the conduct of affairs ; himself remaining in the city for amusement and to superintend the building of the Shrine of the Two Heads, which rose apace upon the river bank. It was noticed that he seemed to shun the Lady Asma, for whose sake he had performed deeds worthy of the ancient heroes. His mother felt his coldness very keenly, nor did she seek to hide her feelings from the chiefs, her near relations, when they went to visit her. Her uncle and her brother ventured to remonstrate with the

king, declaring that his cruelty would break her heart. He asked to be informed in what respect he was considered to have fallen short of a son's duty. Had he not rescued her from the oppressor, and slaughtered thousands of the people for her satisfaction? Did he not wait upon her every day to take her orders? If there was anything of which she strongly disapproved, she had but to command him, and it should be changed at once.

"His coming for a minute every day with ceremony is as great a mockery as were the visits of that squint-eyed slave," exclaimed the lady furiously, when they told her what he said. "In vain do I hold out my arms to him, in vain do I remind him of his childish days. He has lost all love for me. His heart is ice. And all because I wrote a lie to rouse his manhood to perform a simple duty, neglecting which he would have been disgraced for life."

"That can hardly be the case," argued her brother, "for I know that he was working for thy rescue long before that letter reached him."

"Yes, but in what a way! His only purpose was negotiation, or else to steal me forth, disguised, by some mean plot. In the course of years, perhaps, had I survived, he might have compassed my release by such expedients. Is my son a coward? That I asked myself. Or shall men name him so in time to come? By the life of the Highest, there was one way, only one way, open to a man of honour; and that was to unsheathe the sword against his house's foe, and conquer or be slain in noble war! I tell thee, Asaad, he will never pardon me that harmless stratagem, which raised him from dishonour into high renown. My son, my only son, is dead to me!"

The Amîr Asaad glanced significantly at his uncle, who answered with a helpless shrug. Both thought the royal lady was exaggerating a small grievance;

for nothing in Mukarram's conduct seemed to justify such wild despair.

"He caught a chill upon the day of the assault. He has been far from well," said Asaad soothingly. "And now that he is happily restored, by Allah's grace, his mind is bent on pleasure. He has bought a girl, a mistress of seduction, from the Sheykh Salâmah. He entertains companions, not all estimable. Doubtless, the neighbourhood of thee, his mother and so great a lady, irks him somewhat in the circumstances. He fears reproaches ; wishes thee away."

"By Allah, that at least is truth ; he wishes me away ; but not for the reasons thou supposest, O my brother. He has no fear of me, nor any reverence. He is indifferent to all I think or feel. Alas, my heart ! What have I left to tie me to this world ? "

When Mukarram gave command at length for the return to Sanaa, he sent his mother on before him with a goodly escort ; himself electing to ride slowly with his gay companions, hunting, hawking, feasting as he went along. His concubine, proceeding separately in the charge of eunuchs, awaited his commands at every halt.

He had witnessed the completion of the Shrine of the Two Heads, and had been the first to bow in prayer beneath its gilded dome. All men praised his filial devotion and his piety ; whereat he groaned in spirit. He had wept at parting with the little black boy, of whom he had become extremely fond, when the child's paternal grandfather, the Sheykh Muhammad, came to claim him. All men praised the goodness of his heart ; for which he cursed them. He had grown exceedingly impatient of all sycophancy, preferring flat reproof, if just, to fulsome compliments ; but courtiers born and bred were slow to learn.

On horseback, with the city left behind, the wide plain rolling out before him to the foot of great blue

mountains which were home to him, his spirits rose. He felt as if a burden had slipped off his shoulders, and at the same time he had been cleansed of some defilement. He did not hasten on the journey ; but enjoyed whatever sport the country offered ; confessing to his foster-brother that he dreaded the return to Sayyidah, who was sure to make a triumph of his entry after such achievements.

"She is too high for me," he muttered with a laugh. "She thinks in kingdoms. Her whole soul is in that tedious business—a strange failing in a girl who, when one looks at her, appears especially designed for love's embrace."

So he dawdled, spending a week between the city and the mountains, a distance which could well be covered in a day. On the second day out from Zabîd he had detached his foster-brother and esquire upon some errand kept a secret from the others. The messenger did not return until the cavalcade had reached the foothills, and had been two days encamped there in a region well adapted for the sport of falconry. He rode up to the king's pavilion in the flush of sunset, when the foothills were a wonderland of light and shadow, while the mountain wall above was glowing like live coal. The royal party had but just returned from hunting, the king was washing in his tent when his esquire appeared.

"What news?" he questioned, with face hidden in a towel.

"Praise be to Allah ! I have found the man."

"Where is he?"

"At a place called Arka, a day's journey hence."

The companions of Mukarram, most of whom in secret longed for the repose of Sanaa, sighed inwardly when told that their probation was to be prolonged by a day's journey in order to behold a place which no

one in his proper wits would wish to see. But, having once resigned themselves, they tasted pleasure in the ride with hawk on wrist along a valley which the tide of war had never devastated. Arka was a thriving village in the midst of orchards, with terraced fields on the surrounding hills. Close beneath it in the wady flowed a brook which turned a mill.

"Is it possible that such a place exists!" exclaimed Mukarram, as he gazed upon the peaceful scene. "An open village in the highland zone, and yet so prosperous!"

There had been much dispute among the nobles, as they rode along, as to Mukarram's purpose in this ride to Arka. The theory which found most favour was that he intended vengeance on the Sheykh of Akd, to whom the place paid tribute for security. So one remarked: "We will destroy it utterly," thinking to please the prince; whose cry of "God forbid!" however, plunged them back into perplexity.

He bade them halt and pitch their camp beside the stream, while he himself rode forward with but five attendants. The chieftains watched him go with shrugs and whispers.

Beholding evidences of prosperity on every side, Mukarram whispered to his foster-brother:

"A most favoured people, by the Lord of Creatures. That rogue has chosen well his place of refuge. Thou didst not show thyself to him, nor let him hear of thy inquiries?"

"No, by Allah, for I knew that, had he warning of thy coming, he would take to flight."

A crowd of villagers soon gathered round them without fear. Mukarram called to them: "Listen! Is there not in your village a newcomer, the Sheykh Muhammad, surnamed Abu Dad?"

"There is, O great one," answered many voices,

male and female ; and one added : " A learned man, renowned for piety, a singer whose sweet notes transport the soul. It is worth a sheep to hear his call to prayer. He is our teacher, our muezzin, our imam. A holy man ! "

" Lead me to him ! "

" On my head ! " cried everybody ; and they led the way right through the village to its further side, where stood a cube-shaped house amid the orchards. As Al Mukarram came in sight of it, a portly woman was engaged in tying burdens on a mule. A man came running out, supporting in his arms a lute and various utensils. He dropped his load at sight of the approaching crowd and, forgetful of the woman and his goods, of everything, climbed up on to the mule and, kicking, made the creature break into a shambling trot.

" Catch him ! " said Al Mukarram ; and within two minutes the mule was overtaken and brought back, its rider's face expressing most profound dejection.

" What dost thou fear, O secret malefactor ? " inquired the monarch in a mocking tone. " Dost fear that I shall hurl thee through another doorway ? The Lord forgive me ; for thy words, which then incensed me, were the plain truth, as I have learnt since then."

His face was darkened by remembrance, then catching sight of the poor jester's visage of complete despair, he laughed aloud, and cried :

" O destitute of understanding as of manners, what alarms thee ? I come to bring thee honour such as men devote their lives to gain. My command is that thou come with me to Sanaa."

" Have I not cause to tremble, O extreme Beatitude ? My habit is to speak the truth occasionally."

" I long for some one who will speak the truth."

"But I would fain live distant from the life of politics. My soul loves quiet," pleaded Abu Dad.

"Who tells thee that my tastes are not the same as thine? Can men select the way of life that pleases them? Thou hast known quiet and seclusion in thy life, but I never. I have need of thee and I command thee: Come. Say 'No' again and I decapitate thee on the instant. I am no more the easy soul thou knewest. I can punish. Hast heard of my diversions at Zabid?" The king laughed harshly. Abu Dad was trembling. Tears trickled on his fat and pendant cheeks.

"To hear is to obey," he said, "and yet——"

"Dost thou dispute my orders?" cried the king.

"With thy permission I was only going to observe that the departure from this happy village is like death to me."

"Continue, O thou rogue! I seek relief from flattery. By Allah, thy reluctance is sweet wine to me! Behold, you Zeyd and Hasan, how this rascal treats an honour which men like you would give your lives to gain. I offer him my friendship—riches—power. Look at his face, for Allah's mercy! Note his rapture!"

"O my dear lord!" cried out the jester wildly. "Thou knowest not my pleasure in this quiet life. It is like bidding me forsake the path of righteousness for that of error."

"Another compliment! You hear him, all of you? Enough of this! Thou shalt lead a pious life with me at Sanaa. This mother of delights"—he pointed to the portly woman who stood by—"shall dress in silk embroideries and jewellery."

But Abu Dad still strove to argue; till Mukarram, past all patience, asked him flatly which of two things

he preferred : to go to Sanaa as the king's companion, or to be decapitated. At the same moment the king's foster-brother rode behind the mule and touched it on the buttock with his spear-point ; another of Mukarram's people went to the mule's head ; and the jester was led captive to the monarch's camp.



## XXVIII

WHEN Al Mukarram at length made his entry into Sanaa, the spectators crowding every housetop, every window, were astonished to behold a fat old man upon a mule amid the splendid company of horsemen, and in a position of great honour, at the monarch's side. The populace smiled broadly when they knew that it was Abu Dad, the famous jester, whose quaint conceits delighted rich and poor. But the Lady Asma, watching the procession from a loophole of the castle-keep, was filled with rage and consternation at the sight. She had been told the story of Mukarram's anger with his former favourite, whose return just now, regarded in conjunction with her son's estrangement from herself, appeared an insult. Sayyidah also, who was there behind her, looking out, felt very angry.

"Just Allah!" murmured Asma. "Have I not endured enough already? Yet this last injury is worst of all: that a low fellow should be honoured, after being banished, by my son, merely because he had the impudence to call me liar! Behold me in disgrace and that base joker favoured. I ask thee, O my daughter, can I bear it? No, by the honour of the Arabs! That man dies."

"His death just now would but enrage the king to such a point," objected Sayyidah with sneering laugh, "that he might treat us, noble though we are, as common criminals. He dotes on that old rogue. But man is fickle. His fall is but the natural consequence

of his preferment. Our task is to accelerate that wished-for end. Conceal thine anger, most revered of women. Bend thy proud spirit to show favour to this dog. Fear nothing. We will soon dispose of him. Leave all to me ! ”

The Lady Sayyidah, her project formed, was in no haste to put it into execution. Abu Dad had inhabited the castle two full weeks, and was beginning to be somewhat reconciled to his dependent state, ere he received a summons to the presence of the queen. Obeying the behest in fear and trembling, he was ushered to the same apartment where he had so nearly had his head cut off at her command a while ago. On this occasion there were no slaves present ; she was quite alone. Bidding him welcome in the gentlest tone imaginable, she made him sit before her. Then she questioned him about the village of his choice, expressing sympathy with his delight in solitude, yet thanking him for humouring her lord's desire that he should leave it for the turmoil of the court. Her lord, she said, required amusement and wise counsel, and both together he had found in Abu Dad.

She talked in this way till she saw him at his ease, then changed her pleasant, chatting tone for one more earnest.

“ I called thee hither for a certain purpose,” she confessed. “ Well do I know that thou hast cause to hate me, since in this very room I tried to kill thee. I judged thee then a foe, a common traitor, and thou thyself must own that at the time thy guilt was evident. But now I understand thy nature, and I esteem thee worthy of our confidence. Thou hast peculiar favour with my lord. He loves to hear the truth from thee ; whereas, if I or any other said the things thou sayest he would be enraged. Thy power is great for good or evil in the land.”

“ I ask pardon of Almighty God, Who knows that

I am nothing but the humblest of your servants ! ” Abu Dad protested ; yet he could not but feel honoured by the substance of her speech, and charmed by her resplendent beauty sunning him.

“ Now, I beseech thee, use thy influence for good,” she pleaded. “ His treatment of his mother—that unhappy lady, venerated and beloved of all who know her—is an open shame, the talk of all the highlands. Men say that he is impious or mad ; the clans withdraw from him. Thou who hast the privilege to speak the truth, speak out to him. Doubtless my lord has let thee know his cause of grievance—an absurdity—a simple stratagem his mother used to rouse him from his torpor to do deeds of glory. He is still like a child in some respects ; he does not understand the world. He deals with women as he deals with men ; which is a grave injustice. Tell him—thou, an older man, of so much greater knowledge and experience—that women are more subtle, and must have their wiles. Weak as they are, what other weapons have they ? Ask him in conscience what a woman is to do who finds herself in prison, and forgotten of her male defender. Is she not rather the aggrieved through his neglect ? Are not all means lawful to her, in her sad predicament, which may compel him to perform his natural duty ? ”

Sayyidah said much more to the same purpose ; and Abu Dad, who had already, ere his coming to her, much deplored the sad estrangement of the son and mother, promised to use all his efforts for their reconciliation. He spoke his mind to Al Mukarram more than once upon this subject, with the result that there appeared some slight improvement in the king’s behaviour.

“ Alas ! ” exclaimed the Lady Asma to her daughter-in-law with tears of rage. “ That I should have to thank a mongrel dog for such small favours from my

only son ! That I should have to seek the mediation of a stranger in order to secure the bare appearance of respect ! ”

“ No matter. Thank him personally,” whispered Sayyidah. “ Talk freely of our lord to him. Hear what he says.”

The jester was then bidden to an audience of the Lady Asma, who welcomed him with every sign of heartfelt gratitude. It grieved his soul to see so great a queen reduced to thank a servant of the palace for some portion of that honour which was hers of right. He hastened to assure her of his deep respect and sympathy, blaming the king for his unfeeling conduct towards her.

That was the tone of all the subsequent discussions which took place between them. Sometimes he would find her alone, sometimes with the Lady Sayyidah ; occasionally servants would be present, or pass in and out ; but whatever the conditions of the interview the subject of it was the same invariably. And this appeared to Abu Dad entirely natural till a certain day when Al Mukarram sent for him in wrath. Some of the harim servants had deposed to having heard the jester call the king a churl and madman.

When the charge had been made known to the astonished culprit, Al Mukarram roared : “ Well, what hast thou to say, O son of infamy ? ”

The jester, for defence, assumed his manner of effrontery, although in truth his very marrow was afraid. He answered boldly :

“ I maintain that in thy conduct to thy noble parent, no matter what thy cause of grief, thou art a madman ; and that, being what thou art, a mighty sovereign in whom the passions of the common herd seem out of place, thou hast acted in this matter like a churl.”

“ This to my face, thou dog ! ” Mukarram started

up and seized his beard. "What hinders me from wrenching this from off thy body?"

"Thine own command."

"My own command! Say, what command, O shameless!"

"That I should speak the truth to thee on all occasions."

Mukarram laughed, despite his anger, saying: "I never bade thee to be insolent, nor yet a traitor, nor yet a meddler in my family affairs. By Allah, I will have thee punished, and severely."

Abu Dad begged to be confronted with the persons who had laid complaint against him. The request was granted, for the king's amusement; and the jester managed so to browbeat and confound them that Mukarram, moved to laughter, was beginning to relent, when a servant brought a written message from the Lady Asma to her son, entreating him to spare her only sympathizer, the only person in authority who had shown her kindness in these latter days.

"Thou, a person in authority! Thou show my mother kindness! Who knows what foul ambitious projects thou hast harboured, monster of ingratitude! The Lord destroy thee and thy impudence!" Mukarram thundered. He prescribed for the old rogue a beating, which he there and then received at the obsequious hands of half a dozen of those present.

Bruised, sore, and weeping piteously, Abu Dad uplifted both his hands and cried aloud:

"God knows I never wished to come to Sanaa. Thou didst force me to it. Now I depart with praise to Allah for escape from that most miserable of conditions, which is to be the favoured of a cruel tyrant."

"No, by my manhood! There is no escape," the king laughed out. "Thy business here is to make sport for us, and never hast thou done it better than at present, with that beslobbered and distorted face,

that air of indignation. Here, you slaves ! Transport the prince of jesters to his room, and lock him in."

Already, before that, Abu Dad's position had been far from easy owing to the king's uncertain temper. Thenceforward it was hard indeed, since Al Mukarram found his sweetest pleasure in tormenting him. Yet, such are the contradictions of man's mixture, his wits were sharpened by the tortures he endured, his jests increased—to his despair, because he wished to go, and Al Mukarram, seeing him grow ever more amusing under persecution, would not have let him go for all the world.

In hours of privacy he asked his conscience what evil he could possibly have done to earn so harsh a fate. And slowly, but with certainty, he came to know that the crime now punished was his treatment of the girl Yasminah, his omission to perform a vow which he had made to God. By what right had he, the servant of his vow, resigned that maiden to the Sheykh Salamah, a man who had the reputation of a kind of slave-dealer ? He vowed anew that, if God granted him release from this gehennum, he would carry tidings of Yasminah to her people in the south, and thus, by Allah's help, frustrate the ill designs which Sheykh Salamah might have formed for her.

Now that Mukarram's attitude had changed towards him, he was never summoned to the presence of the ruling ladies. Their disdain was evident. The Lady Asma was an invalid, too ill to leave her own apartments, and her illness grew. The Lady Sayyidah was ever busy with the work of government, which every day became more difficult as the mountain tribes, attracted for a moment by Mukarram's feat of arms, relapsed into their old disorder and proud rivalry. All her efforts were now given to maintaining Sanaa in its old position as the centre of the tribal system. Mukarram did not help her in the least. Although he had a

personal, relentless hate of Saïd the Squinter, and had sworn to kill him if he got the chance, he took no interest in all her anxious schemes to guard Tehâmah from reconquest by the Abyssinians, which she saw was imminent. The kingdom built by Ali es-Suleyhi was fast falling into pieces. It had no defensive strength.

This state of things was generally known in Sanaa, where it formed the topic of discourse of common men. But Abu Dad, in the immediate circle of the reckless prince, heard little of it ; and his own predicament was of a kind to make him careless of the fate of kingdoms.

## XXIX

IN the meanwhile Saïd abode at Dahlak with very little diminution of his kingly state. His household and a great part of the army had escaped destruction ; the royal treasure was intact ; and communications were kept open with Arabia, where his troops still held the coast around Hodeydah. Indeed the splendour of his exile so far eclipsed the glory of the lord of Dahlak that the latter, who had been a vassal of Najâh, resumed that rôle to all appearance, wishing by all means to get rid of so redoubtable a guest.

No one of the Abyssinians doubted for a moment but that Al Mukarram's triumph was short-lived. Saïd, in particular, expected to return from day to day, awaiting only tidings of a favourable opportunity. Yet their exile lasted months and even years, without the least decline of hope or joyousness. The officials of the palace did their duty as at home ; the freedmen (captains of the army) and the slaves (the soldiers) were far from discontent with the enforced repose. The court inhabited a whole new quarter of the town built on a headland fanned by the sea wind. White-winged craft from all the islands came to rest each morning on the beach beneath it, bringing the leaders of the troops which, at the supplication of the lord of Dahlak, had been dispersed throughout the archipelago. They sped back in the glow of evening on the purple sea.



Sâlihah from her lattice looked out through a grove of palm trees down to yellow sands alive with boats and people, and the sparkling waves. She wished this time of exile might endure for ever. Saïd at Zabîd had given little time to her, being troubled, often careworn, with affairs of state. Here he was all her own—aye, she could swear it, despite the kindness which he showed to others. He had chosen her for his companion; he confided to her all his hopes and plans; and she strove hard for wisdom to advise him rightly. She studied history, religion, logic, and their applications, in order to correct a little of that eagerness which bore her captive—an eagerness infectious, rapturous, convincing, yet apt, she feared, to lead her dear one into rash adventures. In the struggle to improve her mind she was assisted by Jeyyâsh, whom next to Saïd she valued above all men living. He was the first to show her the true faith, which is for women as for men a staff of life.

At home, in the old mountain fortress, for which she sometimes felt a longing even now, religion had been nothing but a form of words, a discipline, like the challenge of the watchman on the tower or the rules which govern games of war on the meydân. Girls, it had seemed, had no concern with it. She had never, in her lifetime, seen a woman pray until she came to Saïd's harîm wherein the hours of prayer were regularly kept, not by command, but by the pious disposition of the older ladies. She now beheld her people as barbarians, in outer darkness. Great light shone all around her, making all things easy. By the might of El Islâm, she who had once been ignorant and foolish was now wise; she who had once been timid was prepared for any fate. Saïd was her life itself, yet she resigned him daily, together with all other blessings of this world, to the Creator, in Whose benevolence alone she found true peace of mind. Even solitude, which she

had once abhorred, was now delightful, its quiet flooding all her being with sustaining power.

She had expected to be jealous of Saïd's other wives ; but, on the contrary, she felt affection for them, even for one, much better educated than herself, whom he had bought from Sheykh Salâmah at Zabîd. That girl became her teacher in the art of music ; the Sheykh Rashîd expounded the Corân to her ; and Jeyyâsh himself instructed her in poetry and Muslim history. Saïd praised her as the wonder of the age, taking her face between his hands and smiling down on her.

" I fain would be the best of women for thy sake," she told him. " Say, am I of some service to thee, and not all unworthy ? "

" Thou art my friend. The rest are only play-things," he made answer fervently, supposing that her question came from jealousy. But nothing of the sort was in her mind. She was his friend ; she loved to hear him say so ; her pious studies having led her to consider friendship as something high above mere carnal love, for is not God the Friend of those who trust in Him, to lead them out of darkness into light ?

The light in which she lived was darkened momentarily, as though a veil had fallen round her, when she bore her firstborn child. Then, when she was told " It is a boy " and heard the joy-cries of the people in the house repeated by the waiting crowd without, the light returned.

The child was named Muarik from the father of Najâh. He grew and throve until he was a full year old ; and still the court remained in exile. Sâlihah was delivered of another child, stillborn, which was buried straightway in the grove beneath her window. She wept a little in her natural disappointment, but the light in which she lived was not eclipsed.

She heard from Saïd how her folk—the Bani Akd—

had gone back from the alliance which her marriage had cemented. They were now in league with Sayyidah. He might have been speaking about utter strangers for all the personal distress the tidings gave her. Her people had in fact been strangers to her from the hour when she first heard sweet music in her husband's voice.

Not all her time was taken up with serious study. She listened with delight to the old women who tell funny stories, to the gossip of the peddlers coming to her from behind a screen. She walked out with her maidens in the early morning and late evening and sat among the gardens drinking fragrant air. Much of her time was spent in playing with her son Muarik, sovereign lord of the harīm—a soft-eyed, drowsy child, exceeding plump, who very seldom cried or showed ill temper.

One evening, as she sat at her window, looking out between the palm trees to the sea, her husband came to her, exclaiming :

“ One of our foes is gone to Allah's mercy. I mean the Lady Asma. A ship from Aden brought the tidings of her death.”

“ May God have mercy on her ! ” sighed the mother of Muarik. “ She was proud.”

“ A very monument of pride ! ” quoth Saïd in tones of sad remembrance. “ Had she begged me but a little I had let her go.”

“ She wished me to give poison to thee. I was quite persuaded, and should have done it hadst thou been in truth the monster that the Arabs named thee.”

“ I have not heard of this. Tell me the story,” he entreated, smiling ; and, having heard the story, he remarked : “ Well, she is gone. They say her death was of a broken heart, because her son had grown to hate her. He must be mad like all the rest of that

accursed brood. . . . The same ship brought us more important news. There is a rising in the highlands, and Mukarram—or the Lady Sayyidah, for she it is who really governs—has not the forces necessary to suppress it. Consequently he has drawn upon the garrisons ; and Kheyr-ud-dîn thinks that, if we landed with but twenty men, the few remaining Arabs in Zabîd would take to flight. Jeyyâsh has had a letter also from the Sherîf Khalf, who says the same thing though less plainly and in finer words. Already I have given orders to collect our men and purchase ships and other necessaries for the expedition. Our intention is to put to sea a month from now, a date which the astrologers proclaim auspicious.”

“ So soon ! ” exclaimed the mother of Muarik.

“ I too have known much happiness in these two years, more than I should have imagined could be found in these benighted islands, where Jeyyâsh and I and poor Dhakhîrah spent such weary years. It is thy doing. And yet my soul rejoices at the call to arms.” He fell to quoting Antar, the black hero-poet :

“ When the dense squadrons of the foe advance,  
Each urging each, I charge, nor am I blameworthy.  
‘ Antar ! ’ they cry, and every lance’s shaft  
Is as a well-rope fastened to my charger’s panoply.  
‘ Antar ! ’ they cry, and showers of arrows fall  
As locusts rustle on the road to greenery.  
‘ Antar ! ’ The coats of mail amid the dust  
Gleam like frogs’ backs amid a pond’s turbidity.  
Till my steed, tired of breasting points of spears,  
Complains with turn of eye and plaintive whinnying.  
And still my soul revives, my strength returns  
At the knights’ shouting, ‘ Come on, Antar ! Woe to thee ! ’ ”

He laughed at Sâlihah’s distressful face, and cried :  
“ We shall be no less happy at Zabîd, in sh’Allah.”

He then asked leave to see his son. The child was fast asleep. They stood together for a long while watching his calm breathing ; and both extolled his beauty and confessed their pride in him. It was to this

unguarded talk that Sâlihah ascribed the great misfortune which befell immediately, for on the following day the child was ill.

Leeches were brought and remedies applied, but all in vain. The child grew worse. He babbled all one night incessantly, and after that was silent, in a lethargy. Before the dawn of the third day he died.

Sâlihah, who had not left his side throughout the illness, gave praise to God Who gives and takes away, the One Unfailing. The light was round about her, dazzling, blinding, though she beheld it through a flood of tears. Being dead tired she soon fell asleep, nor did the din of mourning in the house disturb her.

The sorrow of the king at first was terrible to witness. For two days he spoke to no one but Jeyyâsh, his brother, and the mother of Muarik, who essayed to comfort him. Then once more the expedition to Zabîd attracted his imagination, and his soul was healed. "No matter," he said often, as he fondled Sâlihah. "It is the will of God. God willing, I will give thee twenty children."

The mother of Muarik kissed his hand. She did not wish just then for twenty children, but for one, one only.

In a dream she watched the stir of preparation and departure, beheld the fleet of ships with sails like wings of sea-gulls, cleaving the endless, dark expanse of blue. In a dream she made the voyage, saw the pageant of the landing, the seaport with its minarets soaring above the press of flat-roofed buildings, heard the shouts of welcome. In a dream she was borne onward in her litter, peeping out between the curtains when they stopped at villages to see the elders pay respect to Saïd, the young men volunteer for service with his host. Nor did she fully waken till she found herself installed in that same chamber of the palace at Zabîd where Saïd had found her prostrate on their wedding

night. Then with the rush of memories that room evoked her blood once more flowed warmly, and her eyes grew bright. She rendered praise to Allah for returning life and for the fact, now for the first time realized, that Zabîd had been recovered without loss of life.

In truth the whole advance from the sea-coast had been no more than a triumphal progress. They had early been informed that Asaad ibn Shihab the governor, with all the troops remaining to him, had evacuated the city at the first rumour of invasion ; and three hours distant from Zabîd they had been met by a procession of the Learned, who welcomed Saïd in religious language as the country's saviour. Never before in Muslim history had religious persons taken part so openly with any great one ; never before assuredly had quiet people, the true Muslims, volunteered for service in an army not to fight against the unbeliever. It augured well for the stability of Saïd's reign. He was delighted, yet he laboured under no illusion with regard to the true reason of his popularity. It proceeded not from his own merits, but the defects of his adversary. It was an answer to Mukarram's wickedness in slaughtering the peaceful Muslims of Zabîd.

### XXX

EVERY seat upon the stone divan around the great reception-room was occupied ; a standing crowd of lesser dignitaries filled the court without ; and yet so reverential was the silence that the trickle of the fountain in the court was heard of all. Conversation was confined to a small party in the centre of the dais consisting of the king and Prince Jeyyâsh, their guests of honour and the ministers of state. The gathering had been convoked in honour of ambassadors from the Prince of Believers and Successor of the Prophet, who had arrived from Baghdad on the day before, bearing the Caliph's mandate to the Sunnite ruler of Zabîd. Saïd was appointed sovereign of Al Yaman under God's vicegerent, and designated king of kings, firm pillar of the faith and saviour of the holy places—this last title being in allusion to the slaughter of Al Mahjam by which he had frustrated the heretical designs on Mecca.

The document had just been read aloud by the chief envoy, and kissed with reverence by Saïd and his ministers. The ceremony of homage was to follow. In the interval, servants of the palace, treading bare-foot and with eyes downcast, offered refreshments upon trays of brass and silver. Whenever conversation languished in the group of great ones, Saïd or Jeyyâsh rose up and, laying hand to brow, exclaimed : " How is your noble health ? " or " We are highly honoured ! " The ambassadors responded, praising Allah for a graciousness which they declared to be unequalled in

the chronicles of kings. Then conversation would revive. It ran upon the health of the Khalifah and his chief advisers, and the wealth of Baghdad. Saïd and his brother and the chief viziers asked questions on these subjects. The ambassadors replied that, praise to Allah, the glory of the Caliph and the splendour of the capital exceeded what had been vouchsafed to any of his predecessors since the reign of Al Mamûn of gracious memory. This kind of answer had been given for at least the twentieth time by the chief envoy, when a new voice joined the talk—a voice as soft as silk yet with a note of raillery, inquiring :

“ How is the health of the Commander of the Ghass, by whose good services the Prince of Believers has been restored to the high pinnacle of power and dignity ? Some persons, as we learn from rumour, grudge the honours and emoluments which by the pleasure of our lord have been conferred on him. These are base cavillers, envious climbers, heartless ingrates ; for of a truth what recompense could be too great for men who, by their loyal service, have restored the realm ? ”

The speaker was the Sheykh Salâmah who sat next in place to the viziers. The question, though so suavely uttered, shocked the audience, as the disclosure of an ugly wound they had agreed to cover. The tinkle of the fountain in the court rang loud in all men's ears, above the distant murmur of the people waiting in the palace square. Then the chief envoy said :

“ In sh'Allah, he is in good health.”

He and his colleagues appeared much confused.

“ If it is permitted to a humble individual to question further,” pursued the dulcet voice remorselessly, “ how many of the Ghass now guard the glory of Islâm ? ”

Jeyyâsh frowned angrily and cursed the malapert beneath his breath. Saïd shot an interdicting glance at the disturber, but seemed half-amused. The



Caliph's emissaries looked exceedingly uncomfortable. Their chief replied with dignity :

" Their number is unknown to me, O Sheykh."

From the crowd of turbaned men around the room and in the court there rose a kind of groan.

Every one knew that the Khalîfah (God preserve his Majesty !) now had but little power in his own house. The power had been usurped by soldier-slaves of Tatar and Caucasian blood, called Ghass in Arabic, whose arrogance and cruelty distressed the quiet folk. The fact was so well understood that mention of it, on this ceremonial occasion, seemed a gross indecency. Saïd by a glance appeared to threaten Sheykh Salâmah with displeasure if he dared pursue the subject ; but in his heart the monarch of Zabîd was not displeased. He had been irritated by the lofty airs of the ambassadors, who presumed upon a mere tradition of world-sovereignty to condescend to him, an actual ruler, worthy to be ranked among the chief supporters of the Caliphate. For Jeyyâsh, upon the other hand, who had a reverent regard for history, the occasion had a quasi-religious significance, and the honour due to the ambassadors was such that no amount of pride on their part could be deemed excessive. He was very angry with the Sheykh Salâmah, the more so that he knew enough of Saïd's sentiments to guess that the indecent interruption might be pleasing to his brother.

When the Sheykh persisted : " We have heard of their benevolence and justice ; how they venerate the learned and befriend the poor," Jeyyâsh said cuttingly :

" It is certain that they bowstring tedious and intrusive persons. Would God that they were here at present, to protect our guests ! "

There was an awestruck hush, succeeded by applauding murmurs. In that assembly such words pronounced in such a tone by the king's brother were

decisive. The Sheykh Salâmah appeared startled for a moment. His eyes blazed. He bit his lip till blood ran down from it. Then, recovering, he wiped his mouth upon his sleeve and calmly smiled into the faces of his anxious neighbours.

He did not speak again, but sat with eyes downcast, telling the amber beads of a chaplet. The Sherîf Khalf, who, being a vizier, sat near the prince, presently loosed the inkhorn from his girdle, took pen and wrote upon a strip of parchment stretched upon the palm of his left hand :

“For twenty years he treasures up that arrow, intending to return it to the archer—through the heart.”

Folding the note he passed it to Jeyyâsh, who, having read it, added underneath the words :

“I also wait an opportunity to strike the heart.”

The note, with this addition, was passed back to Khalf, who shrugged his shoulders after seeing what the prince had written. The Sheykh Salâmah was a friend of his ; indeed to him he was indebted, under Allah, for his present high preferment in a foreign land. Upon the other hand, he had conceived a real affection for Jeyyâsh, on account of the honour which the latter, versed in history, paid to him as a true descendant of the Omeyyads. He built high hopes upon the friendship of the prince, and yet the friendship of Salâmah was not despicable. Their open quarrel placed him in a quandary.

When, after the ceremony of homage, the prince left the presence-chamber, he followed him and murmured in his ear :

“Why make an enemy ? ”

“Was he ever my friend ? ” Jeyyâsh turned right about and answered hotly. “Is he a true friend, to the king my brother—he, who, when Asaad ibn Shihâb was ruler here, was in his counsels then as now in ours ?

What right has he to launch his satire at the Caliphate ? What right has he to make our guests uncomfortable ? By Allah such a man deserves extinction ! He is a maddening insect, to be crushed relentlessly."

"The man is not all bad. I know him well," Khalf pleaded. "It is only that he is by nature of a caustic humour. Be merciful, O prince ! Make some amends. From one like thee, the reprimand was too severe. It crushed him, as thou sayest."

"Would God that it had pulverized him !" said Jeyyâsh, unyielding.

They were in the passage leading to the king's apartments ; and they were still in conversation when Saïd came on them. He clapped his brother on the shoulder, crying :

"By the life of the Prophet, O my soul, thou art a hothead ; though people call thee prudent and sedate. Dost know that thou hast much affronted a good friend of mine, whose sole offence was that he spoke the truth—politely. I maintain that he was perfectly polite. O Khalf, bear witness to his great politeness and my brother's rudeness. Speak truth, O Khalf : was not my brother rude ? "

"Be the charge far from him and thee, O king ; and yet methought that he was too severe in his rebuke of one so far beneath him in degree."

"Well, I considered him extremely rude. The man but spoke the truth. Those envoys are absurdly arrogant : it served them right. Here have we been more than two years exiles in the isles of Dahlak and re-established in Zabîd for near a year. Yet they pretended to be ignorant of our vicissitudes. They knew of nothing later than the battle of Al Mahjam, which stopped the march of Ali es-Suleyhi against Mecca. They keep harking back to that event, which they esteem quite recent. They smile as at a liar when I speak of later happenings. I say, Salâmah's teasing

served them right. Now promise, O my brother, to be civil to a man whom we esteem among our loyal servants. Thou doubtest? Nay, by Allah, we have proved his loyalty. We will not have thee rude to him again."

"To hear is to obey," replied Jeyyâsh satirically.

Khalf then proceeded to the dwelling of the Sheykh Salâmah, whom he found surrounded by a number of his friends advising patience. Salâmah heard the din of talk in silence, smiling only when he rose to greet newcomers. When at length they had exhausted good advice, he said :

"God knows I thank you for this proof of friendship. But the matter has not in my mind the weight which you ascribe to it. How should I enter into contest with the brother of the king? His reproof I count a favour like all else that falls from him."

The Wazîr Khalf, in his turn, essayed to comfort him, relating how the king himself had blamed Jeyyâsh. Salâmah shrugged his shoulders and remarked :

"Let the freemen fight the matter out between themselves. The slave must needs abide by their decision."

His friends applauded his humility ; but Khalf, who knew his man, judged it the mask of some revengeful purpose.

He stayed behind the others to try further argument. Thinking to get behind Salâmah's guard, he whispered :

"Thou wilt be avenged. I know thee !"

"Merciful Allah ! Be it far from me !" replied the Sheykh pacifically. "Let kings and great ones waste their lives in private vengeance. I am a Muslim, and resign my cause to God."

The Wazîr was not deceived by that devout profession. Salâmah meditated vengeance, he well knew. He tried by all means to induce him to speak freely, that he might know what form his vengeance was

about to take. It would be subtle, and not violent, so much could be predicted ; but it still might mean disaster to the prince on whose continued life and influence Khalf built his prospect of a great career. But though he stayed for hours he could elicit nothing. To all his cunning thrusts his friend opposed the same suave smile and mild entreaty :

“ That is past. I think no more of it. Do thou, my friend, forget it also, I beseech thee.”

Upon the next day, at the king's reception, Khalf saw Salâmah in his usual place rise with the rest upon Jeyyâsh's entrance ; and saw the prince return his salutation markedly, and turn aside to speak some words with him. “ So far so good,” he thought ; and yet his mind misgave him.

## XXXI

THE enemies of Sheykh Salâmah scorned him as a hypocrite, an atheist at heart ; his friends regarded him as one of the most pious, and at the same time prudent, persons of the day ; and he himself was of the latter way of thinking, while admitting that his avocations might dismay the ignorant. Besides his trade in educated maidens, he possessed the secret of a subtle poison, for a dose of which revengeful and ambitious persons paid much gold. It was said to be the fruit of a tree which grew only in a certain orchard owned by him. The garden and the tree were fabulous, but the poison had a real existence, and the secret of its composition had brought wealth to the Sheykh and to his father before him. He could, had he chosen, have enumerated all the great ones who had perished by its means in fifty years. He preferred, however, to disclaim all knowledge of this traffic, not that he was at heart ashamed of it, but to avoid ill-feeling. In his view of the matter, he was as little to be blamed for ills resulting from its sale as is an apothecary for the use to which his drugs are put. He never sold the stuff below a certain price, which meant that it was not applied to quiet people, but only to the proud ones who afflict the earth. On hearing of the death of such an one he never failed to ask God's mercy on him. He had a conscience, and an active one, by which he guided every action of his life. But having read much in

the works of mystics who despise the good and evil of this world as mere phenomena, and having not a mystic's but a lawyer's brain, he had thrown off the common view of right and wrong, while adhering strictly to the outward forms of faith. He compared his function in the human to that of Satan in the spiritual world ; Satan being, in the judgment of some mystic writers, purely innocent and faithful, yet appointed for the secret purpose of God's glory to elicit all the evil that is in mankind.

In his meditation on the public insult which he, a man thus honourable, had received from Prince Jeyyâsh, the thought of using his own secret poison was at once rejected. He had never used it on his own account, nor could he do so without deadly sin. In his idea of vengeance he himself must be impeccable, the faults must be produced upon the other side by means of gentle and progressive irritation of infirmities. Moreover he had no desire to kill the prince. His wish was but to make him suffer, and to watch his sufferings. But the man was so exalted and so popular that it seemed well-nigh impossible to touch him hurtfully without incurring public reprobation.

The Sheykh was in no hurry. The rancour remained latent in his mind for months, in which he met Jeyyâsh as usual, and even paid apparent court to him from a desire, no more acute than curiosity, to find his vulnerable points. The Sheykh was not impatient, for he was not angry.

At length one day when he was present in the chamber where the prince was playing chess with his old tutor Sheykh Rashîd—a room with window open on the gardens of the palace—a chance remark illuminated vistas of his mind till then in shadow. The courtiers sat around on the divan, talking of subjects calculated to attract the prince's notice. One sighed :

“ By Allah, it is worse than love, this chess-play.

See, our good lord is absent from the world ! He neither sees nor hears us."

"Worse than love ? By the Corân, thou wouldst not say so hadst thou ever seen our lord Jeyyâsh in love !" replied another, chuckling. "On such occasions—I have known a dozen of them since first he reached the age to think of girls—not only does he neither see nor hear us, but also, and remarkably, he scorns the chessboard, which is his solace at all other times. That is a proof that love is worse in him. He is the maddest, the most frantic lover. He groans and smites his face and speaks in metaphors. He cares for nothing, Allah help us !"

"But that, for sure, was long ago, in his first youth."

"No longer ago than last year he had a little fit of it. I would not trust him now were he to see a pretty face. Praise be to Allah, who has placed our dwelling in a land where pretty faces go not forth unveiled."

"Hearest thou how this rogue traduces thee, O my dear lord ?" exclaimed a listener. "He says that thou art yet of those who lose their wits for love."

Jeyyâsh remained as deaf to this direct appeal as he had been to all the previous chatter. Sitting cross-legged on a carpet in the middle of the room, he was frowning on the chessboard with one hand upon his beard. He had no eyes save for the pieces and the wrinkled hand of his opponent upon the forefinger of which there bulged a carbuncle set in a silver ring which gleamed occasionally.

The Sheykh Salâmah shortly rose and went away without disturbance to the players. He had heard before that day that Prince Jeyyâsh was deemed uncommonly susceptible to female charms, without attention. But now he saw in that susceptibility an irreproachable and guiltless means of vengeance. He



dealt in girls, and was in touch with all the sly old creatures, full of pious exclamations, who go between the world of women and the world of men. In this respect he justified his conduct by the Prophet's saying: "He who protects two girls until they reach the age of puberty will be with me in Paradise, like my two fingers, close to one another."

He had protected, not two only, but a hundred girls of tender age. Outside the polity of El Islâm, women were despised and badly treated. In the hands of the slave-dealers, also, they were liable to blows and insults. Once incorporated in the Muslim world by purchase, women had rights secured to them by law, and were respected. But a girl thus purchased from the slave-dealer possessed in general no charm save that of carnal beauty which soon fades. There was another saying of the Prophet to the effect that women should be educated. The Sheykh Salâmah had an understanding with the slave-dealers that every girl-child from the age of six to thirteen years, whose form gave promise of much beauty, should be shown to him. A girl once chosen and enshrined in his harîm had nothing to complain of on the score of modesty. Her education was confided to the care of women variously skilled in the Corân and needlework, singing and athletics, poetry and the etiquette of noble houses. When a master had to lecture to her upon any subject, a blind man was chosen; or, if no blind man were forthcoming, the man of eyes was baffled by a screen. The Sheykh Salâmah saw her seldom, and then always in a public manner. It was an accepted fact that his ex-pupils never veiled from him, he having stood in the position of a father to them. They all considered him the noblest and the best of men; so did the women he employed as matrons and instructors. That a beauty polished by his training was worth five times the price of the same beauty in a natural state was proof to him

that virtue is rewarded. Conscious as he was of moral rectitude, the loathing, ill-concealed, of many who approached him in the way of business, for his occupation, made him wince at times and filled his mind with bitterness. The injustice of their judgment called for chastisement. Accordingly he used his widespread harīm influence maliciously, delighting to set great ones by the ears ; and in so doing he believed that he performed the will of God.

Returning from the palace on the day in question, he sent a servant to announce his will to visit the harīm ; and following close upon the footsteps of his herald, he spent some time in consultation with his wife. Naming no names, he told her of the insult, now a full year old, as if it had that minute happened, and also of his stern resolve to be avenged. " My insulter is of all men living the most inflammable to sparks from female beauty," he explained. " They say that he would kiss a leper's feet if by so doing he could get possession of the object of desire. Now I was thinking : Suppose a maiden from my house should rouse his passion, then he must cringe to me, or perish of desire. To have him kiss my feet in madness as a suppliant would be a mild yet exquisite revenge. Moreover he is rich enough to pay the price, and in position worthy of the best we have. Who is the pearl of pearls at present in our treasury ? "

The lady pondered for a moment, then replied :

" It is not easy for me to adjudge the precedence. Leylah has a lovely face, but then her figure is too thin. Hind has a figure rounded to perfection but the expression of her face is always sullen in repose. Upon the whole I should incline to choose the Arab girl, Yasminah, in whom both face and form combine to charm since both are animated by a charming spirit. . . . Am I a man, beloved ? Do thou thyself inspect and choose ! This is not woman's business."

She clapped her hands. A servant came, to whom she gave command to call the girls together. They were assembled in the large room where they met for study when Salâmah went to them. A smile of pleasure lighted all their faces as each in turn came up to kiss his hand. The expression of his face was kindly ; his tone of voice, when he addressed them, had a tenderness of deep affection that no man on earth had ever won from him. After inquiring of their health, their studies and their general welfare, he went out again, remarking to his spouse :

“ By Allah, thou hast chosen well. It is Yasmînah.”

And he gave instructions for Yasmînah’s preparation for the part assigned to her.

Even now that he had formed a plan complete, he did not hasten the event nor set his heart upon it.

“ It is a mere experiment,” he told himself, “ which well may fail. But it is worth the making since, if it fails, no harm is done ; and if it succeeds full satisfaction and some profit will accrue to me.”

He pursued his quiet study of Jeyyâsh’s character, and in his idle moments sauntered round the palace, observing every detail of its structure, and the position of adjacent houses in regard to it. One of those houses had an upper chamber like a tower at one end of a broad flat roof, which roof was almost on a level with a terrace of the palace which belonged to the apartments of the Prince Jeyyâsh. The Sheykh Salâmah, making casual inquiries, learnt that the owner of the house was one Bashîr, a merchant. A freedman of his own, who asked no questions, was told to scrape acquaintance with the man and try his luck at bargaining. In a few days the upper room, together with the privacy of the whole roof, was his for no great outlay.

That end secured, Salâmah sent for an old woman called Umm Hîlah, useful to him in his business, as a go-between. He commanded her to occupy the room,

revealing to her something of the game in which she was to be his helper.

"Thou art old and ugly, O my aunt," he told her, "both by the will of Allah and the accidents of age. But make thyself appear more ancient and more ugly than ever daughter of our race appeared before, so that the prince, beholding thee, may pray: 'O Lord, remove this loathsome object from my sight, and in its place rain down some creature fair to see.' He always goes upon the terrace at the hour of sunset. His thoughts will thus be drawn towards thy roof by horror, and when he sees a lovely maiden there beside thee, the shock of rapture will be very great."

"O Lord! O Allah, Just and Knowing! What a mind!" exclaimed the hag exultingly. She chuckled: "He, he, he! A prince, thou sayest? We must put forth all seductions to attract his Highness. Jeyyâsh, thou sayest? The good prince, they call him. Well, good and bad are lecherous alike, though some would hide it."

"When the maiden comes to thee, protect her as the apple of an eye. Speak to her as to a queen, not as thou speakest to old sinners like thyself. Let no harm come to her, and, above all, take care that she display her beauty to the best advantage in the prince's sight."

"Upon my head and my eye," replied the beldame with a frightful grin. "But if the prince assails her with intent to ravish, supposing he should leap from roof to roof—the great are so impetuous—what must I do? God knows my one desire is to obey your Honour."

"If he makes signs of love towards the girl, let her return them; and then do thou feign anger and confine her to the room. Then, coming forth again, lay finger to thy nose, and wag thy head at him across the gulf discreetly, as who should say: 'I can befriend

thee if I would.' Let that happen once or twice ; and then, when thou beholdest him enslaved completely, inform me and the girl shall be removed. Then, after that, if all goes well, I shall require thee to frequent the purlieus of the palace. I need not teach thee how to lead him on."

" No, by my womanhood ; leave me alone for that," chuckled the crone.

She saw no more in the contrivance than a scheme to get from a great man by means of cunning irritation a larger sum of money than he would have paid without such treatment. Hoping incidentally to gain a trifle for herself, she was impatient to begin the serious work ; but she remained in solitary occupation of the upper chamber a whole month before the girl Yasmînah was entrusted to her care. The Arab girl came closely veiled, escorted by a eunuch carrying a bundle wrapped in gold-embroidered linen, which was given to Umm Hîlah. It contained rich clothing. The old woman pulled aside Yasmînah's veil, and passed her hand over the curves of the young body. She laughed : " Ha, ha ! The prince will die of longing at a single glance " ; then turned to gloat once more upon the lovely clothes.

Nearly a year and a half had then elapsed since the day on which Jeyyâsh had publicly rebuked the Sheykh Salâmah, and by everybody in Zabîd except the Sheykh himself the scene in the king's presence-chamber, before the Caliph's envoys, was forgotten.

## XXXII

IN the season of great heat the people of Zabîd were accustomed to forsake the city every evening for the palm-groves round it, where they passed the night in tents and booths erected for the purpose, the poorest sleeping on the open ground. This custom was so general that at night in the hot weather only the palace and the houses of the wealthy, which had gardens or high airy roofs, and dwellings of the soldiers, were inhabited within the walls. It was therefore with surprise that Prince Jeyyâsh, emerging from his private room on to the terrace where it was his custom to perform the sunset prayer, beheld a female figure seated on the neighbouring roof, divided from that terrace by a chasm six feet wide which was in fact a street. He gave no further thought to her till he had done his orisons, when he saw that she was old and of repulsive ugliness. She grinned at him alluringly, exposing whitish gums with one great yellow tooth projecting like a tusk. She was recognizably a trafficker in female virtue. He abhorred her kind. Her presence on that roof annoyed him, like an obscene thought; but, being a friend of justice though a prince, he could not but acknowledge that she had as good a right to sit upon her terrace-roof as he on his. It made him smile to think that Saïd, in like circumstances, might possibly have had her beaten and the house destroyed.

His smile encouraging her, she wished him a good evening. He returned the greeting and then moved away, having no wish to enter into conversation. That terrace was his chosen place for meditation, and he was vexed to have it overlooked by anybody.

She was there on the next evening and the next ; but beyond a humble salutation and most fiendish grin upon his first appearance, did not trouble him. He began to speculate as to her means of living, since she appeared to have that decent chamber to herself and yet was clad no better than a mendicant. He watched her cooking operations at the fall of night, saw her lie down upon the roof to blow the charcoal in a brazier, then, rising, take a pan and mingle pulse with herbs and oil. One night she had a mess of pigeon cooked with rice, of which the smell was appetising. For a few days he entertained this desultory curiosity concerning her, but the loathing which her ugliness inspired prevented him from hazarding a question ; and in the end he grew accustomed to her presence, and no longer heeded it.

He loved the vision of Zabîd transfigured in the sunset-light, to be obtained from one end of that terrace. Innumerable upper chambers loomed like towers amid the flood of gold ; the stretches of flat roof were ruddy, and the rounded domes rose-coloured shading into deepest blue. The crescent flamed on every cupola and minaret. A minute later and the city became ashy dark beneath an orange glow which faded to pale green. Then, as the stars grew strong, the roofs and domes became dove-grey and faintly luminous, seeming to float upon a sea of shadows.

Jeyyâsh delighted in Zabîd and all belonging to it. Its university, its arts and trades, its buildings and its people past and present—nay, the very sky above it—had peculiar charm for him. He was even grateful to his house's enemy, the highland king, for

adding to its crown a gem of architecture in the Shrine of the Two Heads, which he admired exceedingly. In the intervals of State business he was compiling a full history of the city from its first foundation, a task in which he had for helper the Sheykh Abdul Halim and others of the Learned who ransacked the libraries, noting down every mention of Zabid that could be found in books. In the opening pages he had set out to describe the view from this same terrace, enumerating all the mosques and public buildings as beheld from thence; but the description never satisfied him. He desired to make it so complete of outline that the very city should appear before his readers.

Having performed his prayer upon a certain evening, he was seated on the terrace, lost in thought of this description, which alone of all the pages so far written failed to please his private judgment, when he noticed that the hag upon the neighbouring roof was not alone. A young girl beautiful as starlight and graceful as a fawn was there beside her, running to and fro, taking the view from every corner of the housetop. Her voice as she praised Allah for its beauty was as musical as distant camel-bells. She was clad in a diaphanous white garment flecked with gold, which veiled her shape without concealing it. Her head-veil floated light as gossamer.

Turning from her gaze into the dying sunset, she saw a man upon the terrace close at hand, and shrank back in confusion, hiding her face with both her hands. The prince, as a well-mannered man, withdrew at once into his chamber, but he carried with him a tormenting vision of much artless beauty, and a strong dose of the poison curiosity. How came she there, in a princess's garb, with that old hag whose dress was like a beggar's? Was it his fancy, or the very fact, that the old witch on seeing him retire had signalled to him to remain? If so, then the most lovely and most innocent was in



the power of the most noisome of God's creatures. In the name of all things good, how came she there? It was long ere he could calm the agitation of his thoughts.

Upon the following evening, when he said his prayer, the roof was empty, but after he had finished, while he sat in meditation, the old woman and the girl appeared again. Again he withdrew, and again he half imagined that the hag by private gestures bade him stay. But if the signal had been really made, it must be in his power at once to rescue virtue from the grip of vice, and at the same time gratify the strongest wish that he had known for years. The vision of the damsel's beauty kept recurring to him, not as things that fade, but as a growing radiance. His wits were all afire; his veins were throbbing.

At length he ventured out again. It was then moonlight. He saw two figures on that roof. The girl's white robe was partly shrouded in a mantle. She sat upon a strip of carpet with her back against the parapet; the hag upon the doorsill of the chamber. The girl's sweet voice and rippling laugh rang out. With hesitations and misgivings until then unknown to him, Jeyyâsh stole back into the room and fetched his lute; then, sitting cross-legged in the moonlight, tuned its strings, and sang the love-song of an ancient poet, at first so low as to be scarcely audible, becoming louder as he lost self-consciousness. The song was of the desert, of fatigue and pain, of longing for the night and the round moon uprising from a grove of trees, in which were running waters and the scent of flowers. A bush of incense shedding perfume all alone beneath the stars, unconcious, undesirous, was the maiden's charm. How might a wretched man consumed with passion hope to inspire a love in one so self-contained? All love implies the need of the beloved. How can she feel a need who is herself complete? Yet has the

maiden one deficiency. All things of God created have their purpose, and the purpose of the maid is not fulfilled until she wed the man. She shrinks, she is afraid, being as yet ignorant of that love which makes a rapture of what else were servitude. Praise be to Allah in Whose book all things are written, whether good or ill. Our earthly life holds nothing better than requited love, nor any torture more excruciating than that endured by men who love in vain. "O maid, take pity on me; be not ruthless! How can it profit thee that I should die of this desire? Reach out thy cool, smooth hand and touch my brow. Give me but leave to plead my cause with thee. I faint, I die for thinking of her dove-like breasts, the perfume of her mouth, her teeth like seeds of a delicious fruit. O Allah, turn her heart before desire consume me quite!"

He ceased abruptly on a note like a despairing cry. He listened: there was perfect silence on that roof; still listened, when he thought he heard a long-drawn sigh. What could he hope for in that hour of night? He gathered up his lute and went indoors. It was long ere he could pacify his mind to think of sleep, and he arose again in time to make the prayer of dawn, spreading his mat upon the terrace as his custom was. The housetop was deserted. He experienced a little chill of disappointment; then he reasoned with himself. In that clean hour his passion of the night before appeared indecent, ludicrous, a transport quite unworthy of his years and dignity. Resolved to banish or at least subdue it, he went about the business of the day, nor did any of his friends observe a difference in his behaviour. But as the day wore on, the vision of the maiden's loveliness returned to him. By evening he was once more burning inwardly. He was annoyed by the persistence of some men, among them Sheykh Salâmah, who stayed with him till the muezzins called

the sunset. Returning to his room, he said his prayers in seclusion, and then went out upon the terrace which was luminous in all his thoughts. The girl was there with the old hag as on the night before. The actual sight of her allayed his fever for a space, enabling him to see things in their just proportions ; but presently the wild delirium of love possessed him. The old woman smiled and nodded to him meaningly. Was that pearl of beauty to be had for a mere money bargain ? Then was she his, for he would pay the price, however great. Still, not being minded to deal in person with so foul a go-between, he made no answer to the beldame's signals, but sat and dreamed awhile before he struck his lute. The full moon shone, changing the city by her magic to a land of rocks and precipices where he and his unknown beloved wandered near together, yet separated by a gulf without a bridge. He sang from his own heart the words which came to him. For a whole hour he sang, and when the last note died, he fell upon his face. Thus lying, prostrate with emotion, he was harrowed by a cry :

" O my beloved, sing no more ! My soul is turned a bird, and it has flown from me."

And the voice of the old woman grumbling :

" Allah, pity ! A nice business, this. The child has fainted—may be dead. Alas, the pangs of love in ardent youth ! "

The prince sprang up and shouted :

" Dead, thou sayest ? If she is dead I leap from yonder parapet."

" Be easy, she has fainted, nothing more." Umm Hîlah chuckled. " She is young and innocent. Thou doest wrong to sing such words to her. They caused a paroxysm of the blood, as one might say—a stupefaction. You men should be more careful what you say to girls. Such hot-blood passion might indeed have killed my jasmine-flower ! "

“What is her name?” inquired the love-sick prince.

“Have I not already named her—jasmine-flower?” Umm Hilah grumbled.

“Stay but a minute!” he entreated in heart-rending tones; but already she had dragged the girl into the room and shut the door.

### XXXIII

JEYYÂSH, when he recovered from his outburst, felt ashamed. He gnashed his teeth when he recalled his loss of dignity, and the familiarity which he had earned from that atrocious hag. And yet the ache of love remained. He must secure the girl or die of longing ; and to judge from the appearance of her guardian, he foresaw no difficulty. Upon the following morning he dispatched a eunuch of the palace to conduct the bargaining, and all that day consoled himself with thinking that before the sunset that delightful creature would be his. But when his agent came again it was to tell him that the upper chamber was deserted and that no trace of the old woman and the maiden could be found though he had searched the city. Till then Jeyyâsh had kept his flame concealed, but on that news of disappointment it consumed him visibly ; and in the days which followed everybody knew that he was mad in love.

The Lady Malak, who had been his mate for several years and had borne children to him, endeavoured to divert his fancy, but in vain ; till, finding life unpleasant with her lord in that condition, she resolved to serve his caprice to the utmost of her power. Shrouded in veils she left her own apartments and crossed the public courtyard to the king's harîm. There she craved audience of the mother of Muarik, who, being her good friend, at once received her.

Sâlihah was nursing in her lap a babe of two months

old, who had not ousted from his throne the dead Muarik. There were many women in the room with her. She greeted the newcomer with affection, inquiring if her errand needed private hearing.

"No, I think not, by the Prophet," answered Malak with a shrug and laugh, "for the matter of my grief is common knowledge. Say, of you all here present, is there one who knows not that my lord Jeyyâsh, the kind, the upright and the patient, is now distorted from his proper nature and turned into a very madman by the pangs of love?"

"The matter is well known, alas!" was cried on all hands.

"Therefore," she continued in mock tragic tones, "I fly to thee, O bounteous lady, for assistance. He is inconsolable—I know that well, for I have tried all measures. His whole desire is set on this young girl, of whom he knows no more than that she is of beauty and her name Yasminah. I fear that he will die or bring disgrace upon himself by some rash act, if he does not obtain her. Thou art the sovereign of all women in Zabîd. Help me to find her for him that his soul may live and happiness may be restored to us his household. God grant she prove not altogether the perfection he proclaims her, for daily life with such an one would be unbearable."

"Be sure that I will do my best," said Umm Muarik kindly. "And all here present, I am sure, will help me. Yet it is not much to go on—the mere name Yasminah."

"She was with a hideous old woman, whom my poor lord in his transports calls a ghoul and a hyena. We have found out that the hag is called Umm Hîlah."

"Umm Hîlah is well known," exclaimed an older lady, the king's aunt. "She is a common matchmaker. No doubt the girl is some poor creature whom she has tricked out for sale."

"Find her, O my lady, only find her. The sight of her, however loathsome; will rejoice my lord. He cannot find her, and she holds the girl."

"Umm Hîlah used to go to the harâm of Sheykh Salâmah," said another of those present, the wife of Ali ibn al-Kumm, a leading notable. "I know the mistress of that house, and will inquire of her."

"Be assured that I will do my utmost to assist thee," said the mother of Muarik when, having taken some refreshment, Malak rose to go. "I myself am grieved at heart for this affliction of thy lord, who is my dearest brother and best counsellor. If he will hear thee, tell him that I need advice upon a private matter. Remind him that he has neglected me these several days."

"He does not hear a word I say to him, being possessed with devils," answered Malak with a droll grimace.

The ladies of the court sought everywhere for traces of Yasminah, while the slaves sent running by Jeyyâsh each day inquired for the old woman. Umm Hîlah was well known, a byword for indecent guile; but for the moment she had disappeared from mortal ken. The prince himself wandered in search of her, and, returning disappointed, sat for hours upon his terrace, disconsolately gazing at the empty housetop which had held his love.

The wife of Ali ibn al-Kumm having visited the Sheykh Salâmah's house according to her promise, came afterwards to Malak to report that no one there had any knowledge of the upper room or its inhabitants. Umm Hîlah they knew well, but had not seen for many days.

"I told them that the prince was willing to pay half his fortune for the girl, besides a great reward to those who found her for him. That is so, is it not?" inquired the visitor.

"Alas, it is so. He is ready to destroy himself," responded Malak with a weary laugh.

The Sheykh Salâmah, hearing of that lady's visit and Jeyyâsh's readiness to make away with half his fortune, sent for Umm Hîlah of whose hiding-place he was informed, and told her she was once more free to go about as usual. "The half his fortune," he confided to his soul, "is not enough. He must be ready to divest himself of all his fortune, nay, of life itself; he must be abject ere we condescend to heal his malady. The mischief is, the girl has caught his fever. I never thought of that. She loses flesh. Her talk is poison to the other maidens."

He told his wife to pacify Yasminah with assurances that very soon she would again behold her unknown lover. She was able to inform him that same evening that the child was better—was singing like a bird in expectation of the promised joy.

In the meanwhile Jeyyâsh, returning to the palace towards the hour of sunset, had spied Umm Hîlah lurking in an entry. He sprang upon her, clutched her arm and cried :

"Where is Yasminah, O abandoned malefactress ? "

So terrible was his demeanour and so fierce his grip that the old woman screamed aloud in terror.

"Be silent !" hissed Jeyyâsh, dragging her up the tunnel. "Fear nothing, O devoid of understanding. Only listen : I will give thee money, more than those lean claws of thine can hold—more than thou hast seen in dreams—for her thou knowest."

"Alas, O my dear lord, she is not mine. She belongs to mighty people ; I am but a servant. They would impale me if they knew she had been seen by man ! It was my kindness for thee, my regard for thy sweet, noble countenance which made me so contrive that thou shouldst see her loveliness, thinking only to rejoice thy



studious spirit by the sight. I thought thou wouldst give praise to Allah for His handiwork, and go thy way. But men are all alike marauders ; the best of them is not content with sight alone. Their instinct always is to grasp and spoil." The beldame chuckled. " Art thou not ashamed of such impatience—thou, a bearded man ? "

" Arrange for me to see her, and that soon ! "

" Have I not told thee I am not her keeper ? I am but a servant. She was entrusted to me only for a day or two."

" Whose daughter is she ? "

" That I dare not tell thee, for, maddened as thou art by lust, thou wouldst divulge my secret. The maid is cherished as the apple of an eye. Her folk would flay me living if they knew the truth. But this much I can tell thee : She returns thy love. She burns for thee by day and night, and when her people ask : ' What ails thee, O beloved ? ' she answers : ' It is nothing. I am very well.' Nothing ! When her precious body is a prey to that disease which knows no medicine save the contact of another body. ' I am very well ' ; when all the while she dies of longing for a touch of thee, poor angel ! "

Jeyyâsh thrust gold into her hand, and murmured faintly : " Help me ! "

" May God increase thy wealth ! " exclaimed Umm Hîlah in an ecstasy, scarce able to believe the evidence of sight and touch. " Now, by the life of thy beloved, I will do my best. . . . Whist ! I hear slippers. Let us wait a minute."

She laid a finger to her lips and waited motionless until the sound of footsteps died away along the alley. Then she added :

" The city is too public, full of danger of discovery which would be shame for one like thee, so high exalted. Thou knowest the Shrine of the Two Heads ? Close

to it, by the river-side, there is a little house of mud and reeds, the dwelling of an aged man who is my relative. To-morrow at this hour, I shall await thee there. Disguise thyself. In case thou hast a doubt, ask for the house of Mannullah the sorcerer. Now I must hasten or my mistress will reproach me, and very likely have me flogged for loitering."

Jeyyâsh showered blessings on the horrible old creature as she fled from him with clap of slippers, edging along the walls, and bridling as she went. Giving praise to Allah, he returned to his apartments in the palace, a changed man. The Lady Malak noticed the improvement in his looks, and guessed that he had found some trace of his beloved ; but refrained from questions. That evening and throughout the following day he acted sensibly until a late hour of the afternoon, when he left a congregation of the Learned suddenly upon a plea of headache.

At the hour appointed by Umm Hîlah he was near the wretched hut upon the river-bank at a post well screened from observation by a tuft of reeds. Among the scattered palms and fruit trees of the neighbouring plain rose the Shrine of the Two Heads, the crescent flaming on its domes. A train of camels passing in the distance with a noise of bells sent up a cloud of dust made rosy by the sun's low rays. The river, a mere streamlet at that time of year, meandering in a wide bed of sand and shingle, murmured peacefully. He saw Umm Hîlah come with shambling haste ; she went into the hut. His heart sank when he knew she came alone. Then he too approached the hut, and calling peace upon its inmates, bowed his head to enter.

"Welcome, O my honey-cake!" exclaimed the crone at sight of him. "Welcome!" exclaimed the sorcerer Mannullah, an old man, naked save for a coarse shirt once white, with ragged beard and eyes set slantwise in a face the colour of a sun-dried date. He

had been sitting in a corner at a sand-table, but rose respectfully upon the entrance of the prince, although the latter wore the habit of a modest tradesman. Jeyyâsh paid little heed to him, but fell to wrangling with the hag. Where was Yasminah? Why had she not brought her? Did she think perchance that his desire was for her withered self?

"Have patience, O my ruffler, O delight of girls!" she reasoned. "Have I not already told thee she is closely guarded? It is no easy thing thou askest of me—no, by Allah—but a long task requiring guile and forethought. Haste is from the devil. She sent a message, saying: 'Tell him I am his for ever.' That she whispered in my ear when I informed her of this meeting. She is closely watched, I tell thee, so thou hast no cause for jealousy. And she is young to marry. Thou canst wait securely. There is need of strategy and circumspection which take time."

"Tell me the name of her father or her guardian that I may approach her in all honour," urged the prince.

"Merciful Allah!" The old woman pursed her lips and opened eyes of horror. "Beware, my pretty ravisher, or harm will come to thee," she said severely. "Her people have a plan for her which they will not forgo. Do I not know them? I tell thee, they are obstinate and proud as camels, and, being of the noblest of the Arabs, they would count the blackness of thy skin defilement though thou wert the monarch of the world and all its nations. At the first hint of thy approach they would send the girl away to Hadramaut or Oman."

"What, then, is to be done?"

"Leave all to me. Return thou hither in three days. By then, in sh'Allah, I shall have devised some stratagem to ease thee of thy pain."

"Wilt bring Yasminah?"

" Suppose I get her for thee, for thy very own, what wilt thou give me ? "

" A thousand dīnārs, red gold."

The crone was dazzled. Her head swam and she clutched the doorpost for support.

" Swear that by Allah ! " she made answer when her wits returned. " Good. Then come hither washed and perfumed on the day appointed, two hours before the sunset. Thou shalt have her."

" May thy wealth increase ! "

The hut was full of smoke. The sorcerer had lighted a small fire of broken palm-leaves and dry dung on which he now threw stinking incense, the fumes from which were overpowering. He stopped the prince who was for rushing out, and asked to be allowed to read his fortune in the smoke.

" I have no time, O Sheykh," replied Jeyyâsh politely, for the wizard's manner was of highest courtesy. " But tell me one thing only. Shall I prosper in the matter of my present suit ? "

" Describe the girl to me, O mighty excellency ! "

The prince obeyed with fervour, Umm Hîlah supplementing his description with some details.

The old man fell to mumbling incantations in the smoke. At length he cried in a strange, piping voice :

" Storm, sorrows, separation, peace, enjoyment. That is the order written, O my lord. After many troubles, thou wilt hold thy love in full security."

" Praise to Allah ! " said Jeyyâsh.

" Praise to Allah ! " cried Umm Hîlah as one whose conscience had been eased of an oppressive burden. Jeyyâsh, laughing, threw a coin to the old warlock, and then stepped out into the gathering night. Upon the far edge of the plain, beyond the palm trees and the famous shrine, a streak of orange light still lingered in the west, though overhead the stars were shining. It was full starlight when he reached the city gate.

Alarmed at the intrigue in which his passion had enmeshed him, desiring sensible advice with secrecy, on his return to the palace he sent for the Wazîr Khalf, the most discreet of men, and told him the whole story.

"My soul misgives me," was the verdict of that worthy, as he stroked his beard. "The story of the hag is too mysterious. Here in Zabîd who is there who would not be proud to give his daughter or his ward to thee? I suspect the hidden project of some enemy."

"What enemies have I?" exclaimed Jeyyâsh impatiently.

"Nay, that thou knowest best," responded Khalf, who would not for the world have named the Sheykh Salâmah. "Only be cautious. Take me with thee to the trysting-place."

"No, that I will not," said Jeyyâsh decidedly.

"Then take a slave, a eunuch if thou wilt, but fully armed to guard against surprise. At least gird on thy sword beneath thy robe, and have a dagger ready to thy hand. Thou art good, and so without suspicion. Men are villainous."

"Umm Hîlah's fears are my protection. She has eyes and ears."

"Well, I have warned thee, O my dear one; please remember!" answered Khalf forebodingly.

## XXXIV

JEYYÂSH went to the trysting-place alone. As he approached the wizard's hut beside the river, he heard the silver voice of the beloved, and his heart stood still. He hesitated in the doorway. The crone, with praise to Allah, dragged him in, exclaiming: "I can give thee but an hour. I will keep watch outside"; and then went out.

For a while Jeyyâsh saw nothing in the room. His heart beat loud and painfully, and in his ears there was a noise of rushing waters. Then, in the furthest corner, he beheld a white form shrinking—a figure of alarm and, as he thought, repugnance. He flung himself upon the ground, and cursed the day that he was born.

"O Allah, Merciful, Compassionate!" he moaned. "She shrinks from me, by whom alone I live. O Lord, can she suppose that I would harm her—or so much as seize her hand against her will? Am I a beast of prey that she should shrink from me? By the sword of the Prophet, I will guard thy honour as my life! By the honour of my mother I have nought but love for thee!"

"Do I not know it?" came the answer in a timid voice, the voice of a new creature trying speech for the first time. A hand was laid upon his shoulder gently; a perfume as of lilies fell around him. "I trust thee; nay, my very soul is thy tame pigeon, settling on thy shoulder, on thy head, thy hand, unable to find rest in any part for love of all."

He took her hand and pressed his lips to it. He asked her father's name that he might go to him.

"My father lives a long way off," she sighed. "I have a guardian, but I must not name him. But be assured that he is good and not tyrannical. I hope that he will give me to thee when he knows my state; for, if he does not, I shall surely die."

"Light of my eyes!" Jeyyâsh cried out in rapture, with much more of the same poetic character, until, unable to contain his passion any longer, he clasped her in his arms and kissed her eyes, her lips. She yielded, as if fainting, then repelled him strongly.

"Enough! Enough!" she panted. "I did wrong to seek thee. My guardian does not know. I have deceived him. Oh, let me go! I am afraid! O dearest, for the love of Allah, let me go!"

The prince was sorely tempted for a moment. But he remembered God, and the girl's weakness, and Allah's blessing on the strong who yet are merciful. The madness passed. He took Yasminah once more in his arms, but gently, asking: "Dost truly think that I would ever hurt thee?"

She answered simply: "I was much afraid."

They sat down on the floor together, hand in hand, discussing their great love like children who have found a treasure. The voice of the old woman shocked them when it came at length, announcing that the time allowed to them was ended. "Mannullah is in sight upon the footpath. It is time to go. My pearl must be replaced within the casket before sunset, or the world will be ablaze."

"So soon?" exclaimed the prince.

"It is an hour and more."

"Less than a second in eternity!"

Umm Hîlah, having veiled her charge, said to Jeyyâsh: "Depart, make haste! We wait till thou art gone."

He turned to take a last leave of his dear, then stepped out in a daze. Umm Hîlah followed him beyond the threshold, saying :

“ And the money, O my prince of rufflers ? Hast forgotten that ? ”

“ Aye, by Allah ; it is true I was forgetting,” said Jeyyâsh distractedly. He found his purse and told out ten dînârs.

“ What ! What is this, O perjured one ? ” the hag exclaimed. “ Thy promise was a thousand gold dînârs.”

“ When thou procuredst me the maiden for mine own. That is not yet. I stand on the condition,” said the prince.

“ Not thine own ! And thou wast all that time alone with her, and not a human being within sight or earshot save myself who am both deaf and blind upon occasion. Dost call thyself a man ? Go, hide thy shame ! I wash my hands of thee.”

She flung his money on the ground and spat on it, hurling foul names behind him as he walked away. The last he saw of her, she was on her hands and knees collecting the gold pieces she had thrown away, still asking Allah of His mercy to vouchsafe that she might henceforth have to do with proper men.

Yet that same evening, as he sat upon his terrace, the same old hag appeared upon the roof below, smiling and nodding to him in most friendly wise. She came up to the parapet on her side of the gulf bidding him by gestures to draw near on his. He thought she had repented of her insolence through love of gain.

The truth, however, was that Sheykh Salâmah, through his agents, had found out her perfidy, although too late to interrupt the rendezvous. As she emerged from his house, after bringing back the girl Yasminah, she was seized and beaten, then carried to the presence of the Sheykh himself. She writhed before him in a



paroxysm of alarmed repentance, protesting all the while that, by the grace of Allah, there was no harm done. Salâmah, having heard her story which accorded with his knowledge of the prince's character, considered for a while and then commanded her to lure Jeyyâsh to make a second tryst. Her recent disappointment in the matter of the money, together with the fear of punishment, inclined her to obey her usual patron, who, if he paid not much, paid faithfully, and never failed to take revenge for disobedience. Delighted to escape with life, and with a chance of working her way back to favour, she went about the business with alacrity.

Jeyyâsh, whose love was not allayed but rather aggravated by the rapture, three parts anguish, of his talk with the beloved, fell in readily with the suggestions of the temptress. Another meeting was arranged, this time to take place in a certain room belonging to Umm Hîlah which was situated in the Bâb Tehâmah quarter. The place was quite unworthy, she lamented humbly by way of a request for means to make it worthier. He flung his purse across to her. She seized it, called down Allah's blessings on his noble head, and disappeared in the direction of the stairway.

When the prince informed the Wazîr Khalf of this new tryst, that sober counsellor tried to dissuade him, saying :

"Suppose some trap were laid for thee. Suppose thou shouldst be mocked or beaten by low people. . . . For one in thy position, such adventures are too perilous."

"My position ! Allah knows I have forgotten it. My learning, even my religious duties, I forget. I am absent from the world till I set eyes on her I love. To take armed servants with me, as thou urgest, would be to advertise my madness to the world. I am a madman, I confess it. Let me be."

Nevertheless, he did allow Khalf to accompany him to within a few yards of the rendezvous ; where, being left alone, the proud descendant of the Omeyyads applied a little bag containing perfume to his nostrils and looked about him with intense disgust. The pavement of the street, the very walls, exuded foulness. " Oh, the insensibility of those in love ! " he thought within his soul. " To what indignities will not that madness make a man indifferent ! "

He had drawn aside into an archway, prepared to keep his watch as faithful friend although the place revolted him, when he saw Jeyyâsh returning, in talk with an old woman of the vilest species. How could the prince, although disguised, bear to be seen in company with such a creature ? From his hiding-place Khalf heard her say in passing :

" God knows it grieves my soul to give your Honour this fatigue of further walking ; but the neighbours warned me that my house is watched. I had to change the plan at the eleventh hour."

" No matter," said the prince. " I shall behold her."

Their voices died away, together with the clip-clap of their slippers on the stones. The Wazîr Khalf followed at a distance. He caught sight of them at a corner by a mosque, saw them again beside a public fountain, then lost them in the clamour of the great bazaar. He continued walking in the same direction till, not far from the dwelling of the Sheykh Salâmah, he saw the pair again, threading a narrow way. They turned into a doorway, where the hag produced a piece of linen cloth with which she blindfolded the prince, who seemed quite willing. Could anything exceed the folly of enamoured man ? So thought the Wazîr Khalf.

As for the lovesick prince, when at last his sight was liberated, he found himself standing in the middle of a

vaulted room with no other furniture than a heap of cushions in one corner. There the old woman left him, saying she would fetch the girl. She laid her finger to her lip as she went out. The game was dangerous. After a little while she returned, ushering in Yasmînah, who appeared half-dead with fright. When the prince clasped her in his arms, she whispered : " Flee at once. It is a trap. Men lie in wait to kill thee."

" What matter, since apart from thee I am already dead ? " replied Jeyyâsh. But at that moment hellish screams arose. Umm Hîlah, keeping guard outside the door, was being beaten. A second later four black eunuchs, armed with whips, burst through the door and rushed upon the prince, who flung himself before Yasmînah, who had fainted. He tried to draw his sword, but the long robe impeded and before he could release it they had pinioned him.

" Chastise the lecherous hound, the housebreaker ! Cut off his ears ! " cried out the chief among them. " Bring me a knife, I say ! Flog hard meanwhile ! "

The prince prepared for death ; he closed his eyes. But shame, and nothing else, awaited him. Umm Hîlah, a most frightful object, ran into the room and struggled with his executioners. She screamed :

" For Allah's mercy, for the love of your own living bodies, hold your hands. It is the Prince Jeyyâsh—the good prince, as they call him ! "

The eunuchs held their hands and gaped on one another, then upon Jeyyâsh, who now was kneeling on the pavement.

" Forgiveness, O my lord ! " exclaimed the chief of them in mocking tones. " I knew thee not. Who would have guessed that one esteemed so righteous would break into an honoured household to defile it ? "

" Whose house is this ? " inquired Jeyyâsh defiantly. They laughed to scorn the question, and their

chief pursued : " What story must we tell our lord ? . . . Merciful Allah ! Our silence will be worth much gold to thee ! "

Jeyyâsh's one request was, " Spare my love ! " Upon their promising to shield Yasmînah from all blame, he gave them all the money that he had about him. Then, at their command, Umm Hîlah once more bound the linen cloth across his eyes, and led him forth. She guided him for a good while, then dropped his hand ; and when at length he raised the bandage she was nowhere to be seen.

He was standing in a place well known to him where three ways met between high, sightless walls. He ached in every limb from the rough handling. Setting off, in the direction of the palace, he had not gone far before he was aware of steps pursuing him, and the Wazîr Khalf overtook him, questioning : " What luck ? " Jeyyâsh, with tears of shame, told what had happened.

" It is not a tale to tell to everybody," murmured Khalf fastidiously.

" My fear is great lest they afflict my love."

" The girl, I think, was in the plot with them. They will not harm her."

But at that the prince cried out upon him in such fierce denial, declaring that Yasmînah was his own and cared for none besides, that Khalf, to pacify him, said it might be so.

The vizier's suspicions of the Sheykh Salâmah were brought near to certainty by this event ; and while he reprehended the exploiting of a good man's weakness, he could not but admire the Sheykh's dexterity in hiding every trace of his own action in the matter and making the good man appear alone to blame. It was not indeed a tale that could be told to everybody. Jeyyâsh, the pattern of upright behaviour, had broken rules which even sovereigns must respect, had trespassed

in another man's harîm. His fame was at the mercy of five people—the old woman and the eunuchs—possibly of more besides.

Jeyyâsh too felt this sorely ; and for many days his dread of an exposure kept him from renewed attempts to see his dear, and even ousted passion from his breast for hours together. Once more he was of use for counsel in affairs of State, seeking by diligence to make atonement for his late neglect, and also to discredit any talk which might arise against him.

The king was now intriguing with the mountaineers in an attempt to weaken further the Suleyhi tribe, whose ultimate destruction was the goal of all his dreams. He was again in good relations with his father-in-law, the Sheykh of Akd, whose tribe could furnish a large troop of cavalry, besides five hundred archers, at a pinch ; and was besides in secret correspondence with some greater chiefs who, rumour said, were hostile to the lord of Sanaa.

"It is not now as in the days of Ali es-Suleyhi. The highlands at the present moment are divided up among a score of petty kings," Saïd told his brother ; "of whom Mukarram Ahmad son of Ali is but one. By policy I can conciliate the most of them, and then without much effort I can make an end."

"In thy place I should be contented with Tehâmah," said Jeyyâsh reflectively. "The highlands, when we did control them in our father's time, gave trouble always. Hast thou not all that man can wish for, more than any man can possibly enjoy in one short life? Dost crave still more?"

Saïd laughed : "Now, Allah witness, I am not a chess-player. I cannot sit still all my life and move the pieces on a board. Thou wast ever peace-loving. But I—I must be doing. I weary of this peaceful life with all its pleasures. Ere many months I hope to take the field once more, and conquer territory—not

for the greed of gain, O thou old grumbler, but for the love of movement and the clash of arms. Thou wast ever the sedate and wise one—I the firebrand ; except in love, when thou and I are much the same. . . . How fares thy passion ? Hast thou found the girl ? ”

It was the first time since his most undignified adventure that Jeyyâsh had spoken thus alone with Saïd. The brothers kept few secrets from each other. He told the king the tale of his mishap. Saïd was profoundly interested.

“ I think with Khalf,” he chuckled, “ that it is a plot to fool thee. . . . Thou wast inveighed into somebody’s harîm. But whose harîm ? The girl, thou sayest, is well educated and refined in speech. She must belong to some respected house. If we could find out whose house thou didst enter hoodwinked, it seems to me that we could take our measures to obtain the girl. Sâlihah has been making diligent inquiries, but without result. Next time thou seest the old hag, Umm Hîlah, catch hold of her and hand her over to the watch. I will have her brought before me for examination privately. She well deserves a beating for beguiling thee ; and the women of our houses could extract the truth from her.”

“ That I will do,” Jeyyâsh made answer moodily, “ although in my opinion she is not to blame. She tried to serve me to the best of her capacity.”

“ God knows the truth ! The whole affair is shady. Be sure that I will help thee all I can,” said Saïd. “ Do thou, for thy part, help me in my public functions, which are likely to be onerous this coming month ; for I have asked the Sheykh of Akd and his two sons, together with some other of the highland chiefs, to honour our poor city as my guests. My object is to dazzle those barbarians. I would impress them with a high opinion, not only of our wealth and splendour, but also of our strength in arms. Thou art a learned

man, more skilled in Arab poetry and history than any of their mountain people."

"Istaghfaru'llah!" \* said Jeyyâsh with a curt laugh. "'When they asked the ass to the wedding, he inquired: Is it to fetch the wood or draw the water?' What am I to do?"

"By Allah, bear the burden of these gross barbarians! Thou art interested in their genealogies, their quarrels, customs. Go thou about with them, and show them all our sights. No doubt, they all play chess—if thou shouldst tire of sightseeing!"

"Upon my back be it," sighed the prince ruefully. He would much rather have maintained his privacy, for as the feeling of indignity subsided, and nothing dreadful followed on his misadventure, the pangs of love once more had hold of him.

\* I ask God's forgiveness.

## XXXV

ON a certain afternoon, Jeyyâsh, at the head of a resplendent cavalcade, rode through the eastern gate, across the cultivated plain and onward to the sandhills and the lonely mosque of et-Tureybah. There he halted. The heat was very great and they had ridden slowly. Now the sun declined. They had not rested many minutes before a man upon the watch espied the gleam of spear-points in a hollow of the land. He shouted. At once all eyes were turned in the direction indicated, where presently appeared about two hundred Arab horsemen, who, at sight of the arrivals from Zabîd, laid lance in rest and charged upon them with exultant cries. Jeyyâsh, who knew the desert customs, reassured his men, and rode to meet their onset with a tranquil smile.

The Arabs came on at full tilt until their foremost rank was ten yards from the prince, when they pulled up all together, flinging the horses back upon their haunches, and saluting. Then, caracoling, they wheeled back to meet and to escort the chiefs who had not joined in this display.

These chiefs were three in number: the Sheykh of Akd, the King of Karandi, both white-bearded men, and the King of Khaulân, a fat youth of sullen countenance. With the Sheykh of Akd came his two sons, Selîm and Mustafa. Jeyyâsh dismounted and set out on foot to meet them. The chiefs, with frightened cries, sprang down from off their horses, and rushed



forward, eager to forestall his purpose and so mitigate an honour which was much too great for them. It was half an hour before the necessary compliments on both sides were completed, and the mingled companies moved off towards Zabîd.

The Arabs were delighted with this first reception, and all were loud in praises of Jeyyâsh's breeding. On arrival at Zabîd they were astonished and abashed by the evidence of wealth which met their gaze on every hand, and by the splendour of the lodgings which had been prepared for them. But Jeyyâsh could see that they were not intimidated. They looked about with sullen, envious eyes, and boldly asked for things of value which attracted them.

"If my brother had desired to make them wish to raid Zabîd, he could not have achieved his purpose better than by all this outlay," thought the prince to himself. "To overawe, he should have lodged them in a tower of the walls, where soldiers come and go continually."

All went well on the first day, but before long there were difficulties upon points of precedence and etiquette. The kings of Khaulân and Karandî were by descent, and claimed to be by present rank, superior to the old Sheykh of Akd; who, while admitting in a general way the justice of their claims, contended that his own position as father-in-law of the monarch of Zabîd, their entertainer, gave him higher standing and peculiar privileges in Tehâmah. The argument in all its stages was referred to Prince Jeyyâsh for arbitration by all the parties, separately and together. He was obliged to listen to accounts of tribal genealogy, and to all the evil that was known or guessed concerning certain houses. At any other time he might have been amused, but now, when all he cared for was Yasminah, he wished those chieftains at the bottom of the sea, with all their ancestors. He kept the peace by weight

of sheer good humour, and a suave courtesy which masked complete indifference.

The sons of the Sheykh of Akd were uncouth, sullen men, who gave themselves the airs of princes in Zabîd upon the strength of their relationship to Saîd by marriage. At first Jeyyâsh had felt attracted towards the elder of the two, Selîm, because of a resemblance to his sister Sâlihah. But he soon found out that the resemblance was skin-deep. Selîm was boorish both in manners and intelligence, and cherished in his heart profound distrust of every townsman. As for his younger brother, Mustafa, a bull-necked creature with protruding eyes, he thought himself the flower of humankind. Their father was as proud, but had more subtlety. Their faults, as painted by the kings of Khaulan and Karandi, were black as night and ineradicable.

Three days after the arrival of the mountaineers Jeyyâsh received a message from the Lady Sâlihah, beseeching him to go and see her at his earliest leisure. He went at once.

She asked : " When are they going ? "

" Who ? " he asked in some surprise.

" Allah, Allah ! " she exclaimed, stamping her foot impatiently. " Torment me not ! Thou knowest well. My father and my brothers ! When are they going ? They make mischief here."

" They have but now arrived ! " exclaimed the prince in wonderment. " And thou inquirest when they will depart ! They are thy people. For that reason we delight to honour them. In sh'Allah, they will stay for several weeks."

" Allah forbid ! " exclaimed the mother of Muarik with such fervour that Jeyyâsh could only stare at her in blank dismay. He questioned her. She gave evasive answer : " It is because they vex me with their boastfulness, their foolish talk. To hear them, one

would think my lord was their dependant. O Allah, give me patience ! It is hard to bear."

Jeyyâsh, who had experienced their arrogance, could sympathize with her desire to see the last of them. But Sâlihah had other reasons she did not reveal. They spoke quite freely in her presence, treating her as a thing of no account, just as they had treated her in old days in their mountain home. Such behaviour could not but be disagreeable to a woman long accustomed to respect and reverence. But she could have borne with it had they refrained from sneers at Saïd. Of him they spoke with undisguised contempt, reflecting on his servile origin, seeming to think that they had condescended greatly in giving him a daughter of their noble race. The honour of the Arabs was for ever in their mouths. They took it for granted that she (Sâlihah) was still of their allegiance, even discussing in her presence the advantage of her second marriage in the event of Saïd's death or overthrow. She who, since she left them, had been educated, was disgusted by the touch of their brutality. Compared with the sons of Najâh, or indeed with any of their courtiers, her father and her brothers were untutored churls. The wealth and commerce of Zabîd awakened only their cupidity ; and from words they uttered in her hearing she suspected them of treacherous designs.

But when she mentioned these misgivings to her lord in private, he laughed at them and turned them off in compliments.

" They have a claim on my indulgence as the tree which has produced a perfect flower for my delight. The wood of rose-trees has a thorny surface which repels the touch, and yet it has its uses in the hands of skilled artificers. Be sure that they shall serve my purpose, not I theirs. Poor souls, they are not half so cunning as they think themselves ! "

In talk with Saïd, the Sheykh of Akd assumed a

fatherly demeanour, addressing him as "son" and laying hands on him for emphasis. He took it on himself to warn the monarch of Zabîd against the machinations of the kings of Khaulan and Karandi. These might have friendly feelings at the moment, though he seemed to doubt it, but in the highlands they were known for Al Mukarram's men. They could never have that splendid and complete identity of interests, that community of sentiments, that bond of love with Saïd which he, the Sheykh of Akd, had sealed indissolubly by his daughter's marriage.

"The old rogue appears forgetful of the fact that he has broken our alliance once already since that glad event," the king observed with chuckles to Jeyyâsh in private. "What knowest thou of one Huseyn, the prince of Shaîr? My worthy father-in-law exalts his influence among the tribes and urges me to make advances to him. He says that he himself already has prepared the way."

"I have heard of him as the right hand of the Suleyhi."

"That was years ago in Ali's time. Thou errest, like so many others of my council, in supposing the condition of the highlands to be now the same as it was then, when the fighting strength of Ali es-Suleyhi bound the tribes together in one polity. All that is changed. The chieftains now assert their independence, becoming rivals of the Lady Sayyidah, who, rather than the wretched sot, her husband, now bears rule in Sanaa. Most jealous of them all is this Huseyn of Shaîr. The Sheykh of Akd declares that, if we win him to our party, we possess the highlands. I should not give much heed to his advice had it not tallied with the information offered to me secretly by the King of Karandi. Where contending witnesses agree a man may look for truth."

"Be wary, O my brother! With their quarrels

and relationships, which none save Allah rightly understands, these Arabs are as trusty as a quicksand."

"Fear nothing ! Am I not their match in guile ? "

In the intervals of his attendance on the guests, Jeyyâsh's thoughts ran always on his lost beloved. One day, when he was riding through the city with the King of Khaulan, an aged woman clutched his stirrup, seeking alms. He had no knowledge of her likeness through the tattered veils, until she whispered : " On the roof, to-night, be secret ! "

His brain reeled and all the fever of his former madness returned on him, as he pursued his ride. His word to Saïd that he would have the hag arrested, to extract the truth from her, was now forgotten. She seemed the only means to reach his love.

His duties as deputed host detaining him, it was the third hour of the night before he stole out on the terrace, and searched the darkness of the neighbouring roof with straining eyes. At first he thought the crone had tired of waiting, but presently he heard her whisper :

"Thou art late, my pretty ravisher ! "

Umm Hîlah then embarked on a long explanation tending to show that she was innocent of any part of the indignity which had befallen him upon the last occasion of their meeting. She had suffered Allah only knew what pains. It was indeed a miracle that she survived to speak to him. She had been laid upon a bed of sickness by the punishment she had received. That only had prevented her from visiting his noble Honour.

"Tell me of my flower !" he cried impatiently. "Has she been made to suffer ? Have they slain her ? By Allah, for each stroke upon her flesh, each drop of her dear blood, I take a life."

"Thou speakest bravely," sniggered the old woman. "It is sweet to hear thee. Thou art, methinks, a

man upon the pattern of the King Mukarram Ahmad, who slew twenty thousand harmless folk like flies because his mother was a prisoner. Praise be to Allah, the dear child is safe, O sinful blusterer. They have not hurt her ; she is much too precious in their eyes. She ails, and they cannot discern her ailment. Her guardian has no inkling of her real malady."

"What is his name ? " inquired Jeyyâsh peremptorily. "By my life, I know of no man in this city who would refuse to me his daughter or his ward on fair demand."

"Aye, but in this case there are difficulties, as I warned thee at the first. She has been specially prepared for marriage with a mighty personage—or so the women of the household whisper ; what know I ? One thing at least is certain ; her protector does not destine her for any person in this land, however great. Yet Allah knows !—the pathos of her state is such—he might be moved. Thou still wouldst know his name ? Well, I will tell it thee. Indeed it was that purpose brought me hither, demented as I am by pity of her grief. He may relent and give her to thee on demand. But know I risk my life in the adventure."

He threw his purse across to her. She groped for it ere she pursued :

"Swear now by Allah, by thy flushing manhood, not to reveal directly or by implication that old Umm Hîlah has befriended thee in this affair."

"Agreed. His name ! "

"The learned Sheykh Salâmah." The prince was conscious of a sudden chill in all his bones. "Thy darling is the child of honourable folk among the Arabs of the south. She was stolen with her mother in a tribal raid. They are mad people, wild barbarians, for ever fighting, robbing, ravishing ; but this girl is a polished jewel for a king. She and her mother were made over to a slave-dealer, who sold them to a worthy

merchant here in Yaman. The mother died of grief. The merchant gave the child her liberty and placed her in the Sheykh Salâmah's household to be educated, on the understanding that she must return to her own people in the south. That is all I know to tell thee ; may thy wealth increase ! ”

The prince replied with thanks and blessings, while Umm Hîlah shuffled off across the housetop to the stairs which led down to the street.

Jeyyâsh retired into his bedchamber.

The Sheykh Salâmah ! The man in all the world of whom he felt the least inclined to ask a favour. Salâmah had as yet, of course, no knowledge that the man who had violated his harîm and been ejected by his servants was the second person in the realm. What would he think and say when he got news of it ? Jeyyâsh could see his sneer.

Despite the fierce insistence of desire it was two days and nights before he overcame the vast repugnance which he felt to approaching as a suppliant, almost a criminal, a man whom he so heartily disliked—two days of violent distress of spirit complicated by the incidents of his attendance on the highland chiefs. Then love prevailed. On the third morning he entreated his companion Malak to start negotiations with Salâmah's wife on his behalf, confiding to her all the facts related by Umm Hîlah. She readily agreed, and went at once to Umm Muarik, beseeching her to use her influence among the women for the prince's cause. Jeyyâsh himself saw Umm Muarik later in the day, and told his story under bond of secrecy. It was first necessary to make sure that there was no deception, and that Yasminah had not been already pledged in marriage. If she could find out that for him, might God reward her ! And after that Malak would make the bargain.

Sâlihah promised to befriend him to the utmost

of her power. She seemed in better spirits. When he mentioned this, she gave a happy laugh and clapped her hands.

"My relatives depart!" she cried exultantly. "They were saying in this very room but now that they were tired of feasting. Besides, they would withdraw to count their presents. When they are gone, we shall renew our joyous life. Praise be to Allah!"

Jeyyâsh, though sympathizing, thought it necessary to rebuke her mildly, because the men were her relations and his brother's guests. It was the first that he had heard of their proposed departure. But the next day, at the king's reception, the Sheykh of Akd announced with sighs that duties of the first importance made it necessary for him and his two sons to take their leave in three days' time.

"Nay, by my kingdom!" cried out Saïd hospitably. "I will not hear of it. By Allah, I had counted on the honour of your company for months and years. This were a shame!"

It was the signal for a perfect storm of sighs and moans and fulsome compliments from all the chiefs. Was it their wish to go? No, no, by Allah; never! How could their dear one thus misread their hearts? They were henceforth but bondmen of his hospitable house. Apart from him there was no joy in life for them. He was the apple of their eyes, their life, their treasure. What would he have? The will of Allah is inexorable. The cruel current of this world's events dissevers child from parent, friend from friend. God knew that it would seem a thousand years till they again beheld the visage of the king of kings and his exalted brother. God knew that they would leave their souls behind them in Zabîd.

By the end of an hour entirely occupied with protestations on the one side and inducements on the other, the Sheykh of Akd was weeping copiously;



his two sons were speechless ; the kings of Khaulan and Karandi moaned out, " Allah ! Allah ! " both profoundly moved ; for it seemed that some obscure demand of etiquette prevented their remaining longer than the Akdites, though Saïd would fain have kept them in the hope of confidences.

On the day when the whole crowd of them departed, Jeyyâsh received a message which rejoiced his heart. It came from Umm Muarik through the faithful Malak, and was to tell him that the girl Yasmînah was in truth an inmate of the Sheykh Salâmah's house and had not yet been spoken for in marriage. As for the dowry, the women of the house had named a monstrous sum.

" But they will take the half. Leave that to me. I know the business," commented the Lady Malak with a sly grimace. " The honour we confer on them is worth much money."

" To-day I am so busy that I cannot think with any clearness. Wait till to-night, when we will talk things over," said Jeyyâsh, " and then to-morrow thou canst go to work. I would not be beholden to the Sheykh Salâmah, bear in mind. Best pay the merchant fully and be quit of him."

" Thou wilt not be quit of him so easily," said Malak with a dash of malice. " He always claims to be the father of his girls. They never veil from him ; the fact is known."

" Allah curtail his earthly life ! " muttered Jeyyâsh.

The Arab chiefs departed, with presents loading a whole train of camels. The roofs and windows on their route were lined with sightseers. A crowd extended from the eastern gate for half a mile into the palm-groves. Just as Jeyyâsh rode forth between the King of Khaulan and the Sheykh of Akd, five dust-stained men on dromedaries were pushing their way through the concourse round the gate.

"Merciful Allah! Of what tribe are they?" asked his companions, skilled in clan distinctions, with a livelier interest than all the splendours of Zabid had roused in them.

"They must have come from far. I know them not," said Akd.

"Their arms are of outlandish fashion," murmured Khaulan.

A hum of curiosity arose from all their followers, one of whom shouted, "Whence, O noble Arabs?" to the travel-stained arrivals who had drawn aside for the procession. The answer came in strongly guttural tones:

"From Wadi Ahmad in the south."

Jeyyâsh stared hard at one among those strangers in whom he saw a strange resemblance to old Abu Dad. The man thus honoured hid his visage in his head-shawl as peasants do who fear the evil eye. The prince rode on between his guests, who ceased not to exclaim upon the sight of men from Wadi Ahmad, till they reached Tureybah, where was performed the ceremony of the last good-bye. Meanwhile the weary camel-riders at the city gate had sought direction to the house of Sheykh Salâmah.

## XXXVI

UPON the evening of the following day Jeyyâsh sat on the threshold of his private chamber, on the terraced roof, beyond whose parapet was seen the panorama of Zabîd, with domes both small and great and minarets of various shapes and sizes, mellow in the sunset light. His heart was full of glad anticipation, for Malak had gone that afternoon to Sheykh Salâmah's house to plead his suit in formal terms, and he had no doubt but she would get a favourable answer. Made useless for all business by this great excitement, he had retired to his own room with Sheykh Rashîd, thinking to occupy his mind and pass the time with chess. But it was no use. He could not see the board. The Sheykh Rashîd, as great a fanatic for the game as was the prince himself when not enamoured, was now seated in the middle of the room, the board before him, engaged in working out a train of moves upon his own account. Khalf too, as being in the prince's confidence, and having secret reasons to fear disappointment, had come up to bear him company. He now sat cross-legged on a sofa by the inner door, with eyes downcast, his only movement being of the thumb which pushed the amber beads of his accustomed chaplet.

Jeyyâsh, for the first time for many days, was thinking of his History of Zabîd as he looked out over the city and heard its murmur growing as the heat decreased. With what delight he would return to it

when all these storms were past and he possessed Yasminah !

" O Sheykh Rashîd," he asked, without turning his head. " In whose reign was the western minaret added to the mosque of the Amîr Muhammad ? "

" By Allah, that I cannot tell thee at the moment. I will make inquiry," said the former tutor.

" With thy permission, O my lord," put in the Wazir Khalf, " I have heard it said that it is of the same date as the mosque itself, and was the gift of the renowned Jaafar, freedman of Muhammad ibn Ziyâd, from whom the mosque is named, the founder of the city."

" What, Khalf ? Art there behind me ? I never heard thee enter. I was dreaming," said the prince in welcoming tones. " How dost thou know so much about our country ?—thou, a stranger ! "

" A stranger coming to a place sees more than the inhabitants who view its beauties with accustomed eyes," was the reply. " Moreover, I have had the manifest advantage of associating with such learned antiquarians as the Sheykh Abdul Halîm, the Sheykh Salâmah, and thyself, O noble Highness."

" The Sheykh Salâmah is an intimate of thine ? "

" He is my friend, O sun that warms me ; though, as for intimate, I cannot say. I think, however, that he has no friend more intimate. He is not lavish of his confidence."

" Come here and sit beside me on the threshold. Inform me, if thou canst. What is his real character ? "

The Wazîr Khalf obeyed, replying with a shrug : " The question is a hard one, O benevolence ! I cannot answer it in general. But ask me some particular. I can perhaps inform thee."

" These girls who are trained up in his harîm. Is he altogether honourable in behaviour towards them ? "

" By the life of the Prophet, by the House of God,

he is ! Ask anybody. The rarest beauties have passed through his hands undamaged."

"Thou knowest my preoccupation, O my dear, and canst follow thus my train of thought. I ask thee next : Why did he entrust that priceless gem of girlhood to the care of an obscene old creature like Umm Hîlah ? "

Khalf shrugged. "Such women have an entry into all harîms. Deign but to search and thou wilt find them in thine own. The woman is well known and largely trusted. Doubtless your Highness's position tempted her. She hoped to make a fortune for herself."

"I cannot make it out. . . . But, praise to Allah ! we have done with intermediaries. I can now attain my object in the way of honour."

"Praise to Allah ! " came the echo, as in duty bound. But the face of the Wazîr was rueful with a doubt. The Sheykh Salâmah, he opined, was hardly likely to let go his victim till he had made him drink humiliation to the dregs. Nor was the prince in a position to defend himself.

"Allah ! Allah ! " sighed Jeyyâsh impatiently. "See, the sun's disk already touches the horizon, raising golden dust ; and still no tidings."

It was not till after his performance of the sunset prayer, that he at length received the word on which his hopes were set. Khalf was still there beside him on the threshold ; the old tutor had departed with the chessboard. A servant at the inner door exclaimed :

"The Lady Malak has the honour to entreat your Highness."

"I come at once." Jeyyâsh sprang up upon the instant, bidding Khalf await him.

"What news ? " he questioned hoarsely as he entered Malak's room. She turned her face to him. His heart sank heavily. He moaned :

"The girl is dead!"

"No, no; she lives. But I have news of disappointment for thee. She has gone away."

"Gone away. . . . Whither, in what company? Inform me straightway."

"I only know what I have heard from Sheykh Salâmah's women. Her father, a great sultan in the distant south, from whom she had been torn in infancy, found out her whereabouts and came to fetch her. This morning he set out for his own country, taking her with him."

Jeyyâsh had flung himself, face down, upon a sofa. Fearing the effect the blow might have on one so fevered, Malak went near and tried to comfort him. He paid no heed; but, rising suddenly, exclaimed:

"Say, whither has she gone that I may follow her!"

"She will be found. Have patience, O beloved!" she murmured tenderly; but he seemed not to hear her. He stood a moment as one thunderstruck, then, with a cry to Allah for assistance, rushed from the room.

A half-hour later, he, with Khalf beside him, was at the door of Sheykh Salâmah's house. They were admitted. The Sheykh Salâmah was compassionate when he had heard the story. He gave the prince a full account of the departure of Yasmînah, which amounted to no more than that unfortunate had heard already from the lips of Malak.

"Why didst thou let her go?" wailed out Jeyyâsh.

"'The child belongs to the parent'—the words are of the Prophet, may God bless and keep him! To withhold her from her lawful owner had been impious. Moreover, I was unaware that she was known, much less demanded, by your noble Highness."

"Whither have they borne her?"

"To the distant south—more than a month's incessant journey, so they told me. Her father is

the sultan of a tribe—the Bani something—I had the name, but it escapes my memory, for it was unfamiliar.”

The Sheykh’s demeanour was of perfect candour and benevolence.

Jeyyâsh indulged in transports of entreaty, begging Salâmah to recall the name, to rack his memory.

“ It still escapes me,” was the placid answer.

“ When did they go ? ” exclaimed Jeyyâsh at length.

“ At dawn of this same day.”

“ To horse, O Khalf, we ride to overtake them. Not a minute must be lost,” cried the demented lover.

On that the Sheykh Salâmah reasoned with him as a father might, urging the loss of dignity, the public scandal ; and Khalf, though he observed him closely, could discern no hint that he was taking pleasure in this rôle of mentor.

The vizier at length succeeded in inducing his companion to return to his own place, upon the understanding that they should set out upon the morrow if he still desired it. Fearful for his health, and having an affection for him which was bound up with the projects of his own ambition, Khalf stayed with him that night. There was no sleep for either of them. In the morning a strange mood of anger took possession of Jeyyâsh. He vowed, first, that the Sheykh Salâmah was in league with the girl’s tribe and had agreed with them to smuggle her away ; and then that it was all a lie, and she was hidden somewhere in the city with the hag Umm Hîlah. He sent out messengers in search of the old woman, vowing to extort from her a full confession. In the council-chamber he assailed the Sheykh Salâmah, adjuring him, as he loved life, to name that tribe.

Salâmah drew himself away with gentle dignity, assuring him :

"I will do everything in my power to serve your Highness."

Saïd came to see his brother in the noonday rest, blaming him strongly for his mad behaviour. He said :

"Salâmah has just told me the whole story, and I can see that all the blame throughout is thine. It is a change—not so ?—for me to lecture thee, the wise one, but verily thy conduct brings dishonour to our house. For shame, my brother—thou, a bearded man—thus to run wild about a pretty girl ! It is besides annoying that thou shouldst be witless at a time like this when, as it happens, I have need of counsel on a matter which I do not care to lay before my paid advisers. Wilt deign to listen for a moment ? Clear thy brain ! "

Taking from the bosom of his robe a letter, he proceeded to relate how Huseyn, prince of Shaïr—the same of whom the Sheykh of Akd had spoken favourably—proposed a close alliance with a view to raid Dhu Jiblah, the place to which, at his wife's instance, Mukarram had removed his court and residence. Dhu Jiblah was an open town, and not a fort like Sanaa. Yet Mukarram and the Lady Sayyidah were in it ; and they once captured, all the highlands would be his. He read aloud :

" 'The people, it is known for certain, would prefer thee for their ruler to these heretics.' . . . What thinkest thou of that ? There seems to be but little risk, and the adventure tempts me. We march with, say, a quarter of our forces, and effect a junction with this prince of Shaïr and other chiefs ; then we surprise Dhu Jiblah, and make an end for ever of that race of serpents. Art dumb, O foolish one ? What thinkest thou ? "

"I think that thou hadst better sit at ease," replied his brother irritably. "What ails thee ? Hast thou not enough dominion—aye, and love ! Thou art not



stung, as I am, by ten thousand hornets. . . . O Allah, teach me the direction and I start to-day ! ”

“ My nature is to scale fresh heights,” quoth Saïd haughtily. “ The Sheykh Salâmah is in favour of the scheme.”

“ Then renounce it instantly, for he is sinister.”

“ A curse on thy distraction,” cried out Saïd angrily. “ Thou talkest madness when I ask for counsel.” He added : “ Allah knows if thou hast even heard me.”

## XXXVII

ABU DAD had dwelt two years at Sanaa and one year at Dhu Jiblah as the butt of Al Mukarram's humour ; forced by his position to make laughter which his spirit loathed. Regarding this unhappy lot as owing to his failure to keep his vow to God about Yasminah, he came to think that it would not be well with him again till he had done his utmost to retrieve that sinful error. To approach the Sheykh Salamah was, he felt, impossible, after the lapse of time and his defeat by that astute practitioner. But he could journey to the distant south to tell her people of her whereabouts. The project by its very hardship savoured of atonement ; and it soon became the goal of all his hopes. But when he told Mukarram of his purpose, craving leave to go, the prince made sport of him, deriding piety in one so fat, and treating his persistence as a killing joke.

The monarch, once the soul of kindness, now took pleasure in tormenting. Men said that he had killed his mother with his sarcasms. He was grown capricious, cruel, more than ever indolent. He had formally resigned the conduct of the State to Sayyidah ; but when she begged him to release her from the marriage bed, alleging that the woman who controlled a kingdom must be free, he terrified her by his anger, if report spoke true. Abu Dad was sorry for the ruin of so brave a prince, and his hearty disapproval of her husband's courses secured him toleration from the queen, who had at first disliked him.

The little hand of Sayyidah, in politics, outweighed the mighty fist of Al Mukarram Ahmad. Rough fighting chiefs, as fierce as they were independent, swore by their beards that she had not her equal upon earth. They would have scorned to bend the knee to any man till forced to do so; but this young woman, with her beauty and her winning manners, overcame them. They boasted of her as the flower of their country; for was she not a daughter of the highlands, their own kith and kin? In a land where pedigrees are the most common subject of discussion, her genealogy was of the noblest, and her husband's matched it. After two years of her diplomacy, the court at Sanaa had become almost as much the sun and centre of the tribal system as it had been under Ali es-Suleyhi; though now the clans could boast of independence. Most of the chiefs were orthodox in their religious calling. Sayyidah, like all the rest of the Suleyhi tribe, was for the false Khalifah. It made no difference. She was a charming woman, and of their own blood.

Now that she ruled alone and by such peaceful arts, the queen was not content with Sanaa for a capital. The associations of that city were all warlike. The clank of arms resounded in its streets. Accordingly she made a progress through her territory, seeking some pleasant spot, and found Dhu Jiblah. On her return she had an interview with Al Mukarram and begged him to be good enough to come and see that earthly paradise. Sanaa was not a residence designed for pleasure; but of Dhu Jiblah could be made a city of delights. He was attracted. On the morning of departure she took him to a point of vantage on the castle wall whence he could see the crowd of market-people from the villages, thronging the square below. He saw men fully armed who marched with warlike stride; only a sample of the goods for sale was shown; few women and no children were in sight. Then, on

the morning after their arrival at Dhu Jiblah, she led him to a similar position on the palace roof. He saw men, quite unarmed, driving or leading mules and asses, staggering beneath their loads of corn or vegetables, women bearing pitchers full of honey, milk or butter on their heads, and children taking care of sheep and goats. The little town was bowered in fruit trees, between two noisy streams converging in a spacious glen. The shadow of the heights was on it in the afternoon. Mukarram was convinced. He gave his wife authority to move the seat of power from Sanaa to Dhu Jiblah, where he remained, enchanted, with his train of followers ; among whom, as usual, was poor Abu Dad. The jester made arrangements for his wife to join him.

Dhu Jiblah was, in truth, a pleasant spot—polluted Abu Dad considered, by the presence of the court. He disliked that life of soulless folly more and more as months went by ; though sometimes, in the lights and laughter, he forgot his cares and won the old applause by his buffoonery. Bitterly did he repent such lapses afterwards, since they tended only to prolong his servitude.

Mukarram had become a perfect oaf ; and he was now so stout that he no longer joked about the jester's fatness. The only time when the old spirit flamed in him was when anybody chanced to mention Saïd the Squinter. Then his eyes would flash, his hand would strike his knee, and with an oath he would exclaim :

“ God, let me crush him ! ”

To have to listen to such threats in silence gave Abu Dad the feelings of a traitor to his former benefactors. He knew well that the queen shared Al Mukarram's sentiments, that all her wheedling of the mountain chiefs had but one aim, to strike a blow at Saïd. . But he was nothing in their sight—a favoured

hound, a parrot. If he ventured a remark upon a serious subject, it was received either with frowns as an impertinence or else with roars of laughter as a jest.

The latter was the case on an occasion when several of the chiefs were feasting with Mukarram. Abu Dad had ventured to suggest that all Tehâmah, being Sunnite, ought naturally to be governed by a Sunnite prince.

"But we are Sunnite also in the highlands—all save a few," remarked a chief with face of deep amusement, deigning to bandy words with so renowned a joker.

"But, with reverence be it said, your Honours care not for religion in the same way that the people of Tehâmah care," objected Abu Dad.

"How knowest thou, O father of advice, that we should not prefer a Sunnite leader, though a slave, to Al Mukarram here, who is a monstrous heretic? Behold the earnestness wherewith he treads the path of error, the way he persecutes the orthodox in his domain!"

The speaker was Huseyn, the prince of Shaîr, a man exalted in the counsels of the queen.

"Now, by my soul!"—he slapped his knee—"it is a bright idea. We Sunnis must take refuge in the squinting black man from Mukarram's tyranny."

There was much laughter, in which Abu Dad was bound to join, the chieftains making much of their host's heterodoxy, and complaining of his harsh oppression and fanaticism.

Not long after that conversation Abu Dad approached Mukarram with his periodical request for leave to travel to the Wadi Ahmad in fulfilment of his vow. It was refused as usual. Indeed he now despaired of ever winning clear of this accursed court. What was his amazement when, a fortnight later, being summoned to the presence of the queen, he was informed that he

might go immediately and with a proper retinue, upon condition that he kept his going secret! He accepted. Coming forth bewildered from the presence, he encountered in the ante-room the prince of Shaïr, who clapped him on the shoulder, whispering :

“ That was a good idea of thine about the Sunnis. It may come to pass. Keep that a secret in thy breast from all men living except Saïd the Squinter or his brother if thou chance to meet them.”

The bewilderment of Abu Dad was much increased by this remark, and so still more was his desire to quit that labyrinth of mingled folly and intrigue. He went to his own house to make arrangements for the start, which was appointed to take place at dawn next day. In the meanwhile Sayyidah had told the prince of Shaïr : “ I have disposed of Abu Dad. The poor old man is bound by ties of old affection to those black men. He is best out of the way while we design their overthrow ; for Allah knows he might dissuade my lord, who is capricious. Let him pay his vow, and journey to the Wadi Ahmad—which is nowhere ! ”

The wife of Abu Dad wept much at parting, imploring him to take her with him ; but that could not be. The travel was too rough, the way too dangerous.

“ I go in God’s protection,” he informed her, weeping also, “ in pursuance of a solemn vow I made to Him. I leave thee all my money. If I die . . . ”

“ What reck I of thy money ? It is thou, thyself ! ”

“ Please God I shall return to thee,” sobbed Abu Dad.

He set out on his journey with a heavy heart. Dhu Jiblah looked so peaceful in the early light, and the task before him was so long and arduous ! By the queen’s bounty he was provided with a guide and an armed escort, the whole train being mounted on six trotting camels. But after a week’s travel in the

mountains one of these fell lame ; its rider halted in the nearest village. A few more days of hardship and the guide deserted, taking with him a good part of the provisions. Two of the servants hunted him and brought him back. They beat him soundly. It all meant delay.

They were by then outside the jurisdiction of the Lady Sayyidah, in a strange land where every man they met might be an enemy. The people of his escort, from the base servility which at setting out had marked their conduct towards the royal favourite, had come to treat the jester as an equal—nay, even to command him on occasions. His facetious reputation stood him now in better stead than all his favour with the king and queen, the fear of whose despotic power had vanished with the distance from Dhu Jiblah. The men had lost all notion of obedience to him, but had acquired instead a liking for him as a cheerful soul. Thus they proceeded for a month or more, and still the guide assured them they were far from Wadi Ahmad. The scenery grew wild and ever wilder. Wells were few and far between. Often their souls grew faint for lack of water. Each night they heard the howl of savage beasts. Ferocious eyes glowered out among the rocks, reflecting back the brightness of their guardian fire. The men grew ill at ease, though Abu Dad beguiled the way with songs and stories. They grumbled openly.

Then Abu Dad was silenced by a stroke of fever, which reduced his spirit to the lowest ebb. He joked no longer.

One night, while he lay ill, they held a council. The guide informed them it was still ten days to Wadi Ahmad ; and the way was through a sandy desert without trace of water. They decided to return, bearing the jester with them. Abu Dad, overhearing all they said, cried out that he would still go on—alone,

if need be. The men, who bore him much good will, tried to dissuade him ; but, when they heard that he had made a vow, desisted with appeals to Allah and despairing shrugs.

“ Now listen, O beloved,” said their leader. “ We do this for thee : we leave thee half the dates and bread we have for all of us, sufficient to support existence till the journey’s end. Thou hast thy camel and the means of making fire of nights ; also a water-skin which thou canst fill at the next spring, which is situated in the chasm over yonder ridge, in a position just beneath that bright green star. It is the last before thou comest to the sandy desert.”

The guide, who had become the most submissive of the company through fear of being lonely in that barren land, described to him the course which he must take, both by the features of the land and by the stars. Abu Dad thanked them, and thereafter fell into a sleep disturbed by evil dreams.

The men were better than their word, for they escorted him next day as far as to the spring in the adjacent gorge, and filled the skin for him. From thence the guide was able to point out the way. It lay through a great gateway formed of reddish rocks between which lay the sand as white and smooth as by the sea. A veritable sea spread out beyond, but all of sand. Shining faintly in the sun it stretched for miles into the heat-haze, above which, in the distance could be seen a crest of pale blue mountain, faint as the tender petal of a flower. In the direction of that peak he had to go ; and to his fevered mind the road seemed marked upon the plain—a road as fine as the hair-bridge which leads to Paradise—a road which must be followed faithfully, or he would fall to Hell.

They sped him on his lonely way with shouts of blessing. He never once looked back. All day he rode across the burning sand, stopping at sunset to



refresh his camel and himself with an allowance of the precious water and a bite of food ; then on again, beneath great stars which glared like eyes, always towards that peak upon the far horizon. For four days he proceeded thus, and then his wits forsook him. He only saw the landscape at rare intervals, and then it struck him as unreal, a thing of dreams. Still he kept riding on, reciting the Corân in a high, piping voice—the Sûrah of Ya Sîn appropriated to the dying.

He no longer thought about his camel's need, but urged him on, feeling, himself, no need of food, though he drank water greedily until the skin upon the saddle became limp and empty. And still he rode, not knowing day from night, and chanting, till his camel knelt down suddenly and he was thrown upon the sand. He knew no more.

## XXXVIII

WHEN Abu Dad at last awoke, it was to find himself recumbent in a place so dark and silent that he thought it was the grave. Then he discerned a tiny strip of blue let into darkness, and one throbbing star. Listening intently, he heard sounds of breathing ; a horse coughed, and then suddenly the mystery took shape, the horror vanished, and he realized that he was in a habitation of the desert people—a tent of camel's hair, of which the entrance-flap hung loose, disclosing a thin strip of the blue night without. He lay on a soft bed, his limbs were covered with a quilt. He must be therefore among friends. In the relief of this discovery he fainted off into a quiet sleep.

When he again awoke from slumber it was day. An old man and a girl were with him in his place of rest which, he could now see plainly, was a corner of a large black tent, screened off by hanging rugs.

"How far to Wadi Ahmad ?" he asked faintly.

"By Allah, thou art here in Wadi Ahmad, and a welcome guest," the old man answered ; while the girl, drawing her veil across her mouth, retired precipitately.

"Praise be to Allah !" murmured Abu Dad as one bemused.

"Whom seekest thou in Wadi Ahmad, O beloved of Allah !"

"I seek the Sultan of the Bani Sôr."

"Then thou hast found him."

Abu Dad gazed at the old man, bewildered. He appeared no more magnificent than any common Bedawi; yet the mother of Yasminah had talked much about her father's power, his pride and dignity. Had she then lied?

"Art thou in truth the monarch whom I seek?" he questioned earnestly. "Swear by the Lord of Heaven and Earth that thou dost not deceive me!"

"By the Creator of the Worlds, I swear it—for thy pleasure," said the old man calmly, in the tone of one who would appease the demon of delirium by quiet speech.

In a trice the jester, strengthened by excitement, had begun his story, nor could all his host's commands that he should wait for health dissuade him from proceeding to the end.

At last he closed his eyes. "Praise be to Allah, I have paid the debt," he panted, and lay still.

"Thou hast travelled hither from the land of Sanaa, from the mountains of Al Yaman, all alone, to bring me tidings of my daughter's fate, my grandchild's whereabouts! By the honour of the Arabs, thou art henceforth of my blood!" exclaimed his host with wonder. "But speak no more at present. Drink this bowl of milk; then sleep, and God restore thy natural health!"

Some hours or some days later—the patient kept no accurate account of time—that old man and three others sat beside his bed.

"These are my sons," the Sheykh was saying. "Of thy kindness recapitulate the history, that they may say that they have heard it from the lips of true report."

The sick man wearily obeyed. They asked him questions, which he answered to the best of his ability.

"And my granddaughter Yasminah is in the city of Zabid, there in the north, and in an honourable

household ? She must be now a woman ! ” sighed the chief.

“ It is the truth,” said Abu Dad. “ The man in whose harim I left her is accounted honourable. In his house she has received a noble education.”

“ The Lord reward the man a hundredfold ! And is she well ? ”

“ Remember, O my lords, I have not seen her for four years. She then was well, and showed the promise of great beauty.”

“ As soon as thou art whole once more, we go to fetch her. My son Mahrûs, here present, shall be regent in my absence. It seems a thousand years till I behold the dear one ! ”

In yet another of those waking intervals, which were like dreams in a long sleep, his host spoke thus to him :

“ It must surprise thee to see men of noble birth and warlike training thus earnestly concerned about the fate of a young girl. Thou dost not know how dear Mudallaleh, the mother of Yasminah, was to all our race. Her beauty had become a byword throughout all this country. The chiefs of all the neighbouring tribes desired her. But she was my delight, I would not part with her ; I gave her to my brother’s son, Muhammad, in order that she might remain to gladden my declining years. This roused the anger of the Bani Sakhrâh, whose chief had been her most persistent suitor. They waited years and then they made a raid in force against our summer quarters, which were in this very spot where we are now encamped. The main force of our nation was elsewhere ; the tents were slightly guarded. They slew my son-in-law Muhammad and carried off Mudallaleh and her attendants and the child with much indignity. Later we heard that they had sold them to the dealers, who had carried them no man knew whither through the world. Many were

the journeys which we made in search of them the first two years. We came to think that they had been conveyed beyond the seas, whether to Hind or Sind or to the isles of Africa. And now thou comest, in a blessed hour, to tell us that she died in honour, while her child still lives."

"What of the Bani Sakhrāh?" questioned Abu Dad. "Could no man of them be persuaded to inform you of her whereabouts?"

"We did not ask them," answered the old Sultan grimly. "Within a year of that unheard-of outrage, we fell on them with all our strength, and gave no quarter. We slew their babes in arms, their aged folk, their women, together with their fighting braves. Some few, of course, escaped; and for two years our young men tracked and hunted them. Now, not one of all that race is left alive to boast of how they stole the glory of the Bani Sôr. The world is cleansed of all remembrance of them. Praise to Allah! . . . Say, had they any right to rob us of our pearl—us, who are quiet people, who wrong nobody?"

Abu Dad was still surprised to hear the old man talk about his power, for the tent and its adornments were quite homely. But when, his strength being restored, they struck the camp, and he was borne a two-days' journey in a litter to a stone-built village, with a fortress, the headquarters of the tribe, he realized that the Sultan of the Bani Sôr was no mere petty chief. His standing force consisted of a hundred horsemen and three hundred archers; and ten times that number answered when his war-horns sounded in the hills. The sick man heard them, rousing all the echoes, on the morning after his arrival in the citadel; summoning the nation to receive the tidings that Yasmīnah had been found. He was astonished at the multitude, consisting of men fully armed, and disciplined in bearing, which in a little while assembled round the

village. At first it was suggested that the aged Sultan should go with a great army to Zabîd to claim his grandchild. But Abu Dad objected that to do so would alarm the world ; that, as no difficulty was anticipated and no force required, it would be better to go privately, without display, lest wicked people, learning of Yasminah's consequence, might spirit her away in order to extort a ransom.

So it happened that, some six weeks after his appearance in the Wadi Ahmad, the sometime jester of Najâh set out on his return to Yaman in the company of the Sultan of the Bani Sôr and with a splendid escort. The escort went with them no further than the tribal frontier, whence the travellers advanced on camels with but four attendants. These men, though rugged, were alert and willing ; and long before he reached the journey's end Abu Dad acclaimed them as the best-trained servants he had known in all his life. At length they reached Zabîd upon a day of some festivity and found their way to Sheykh Salâmah's house. The Sheykh was out. They went then to a khan, and ordered their apparel, returning at the first hour of the night. The Sheykh was in.

The Sheykh read through a document which Abu Dad presented to him, acknowledged his own signature, and asked politely :

" Is this Sheykh of the Arabs, thy companion, the Sultan, herein mentioned, of the Bani Sôr ? "

" The same, O excellency ! "

Salâmah turned to the old Bedawi with an engaging smile, and said :

" Thou wouldst obtain from me a girl, thy granddaughter, who for four years has been a guest of my unworthy house ? Wouldst know her if I showed her to thee among others of her age, O lion of the South ? "

" Nay, O my lord ! I have not seen her since her

age was but five years. And yet I think that I should know her by her mother's eyes."

The Sheykh Salâmah clapped his hands and gave an order.

"Have the goodness to retire into the ante-room," he said to Abu Dad. "Thou art not yet so old that thou canst gaze on beauty with immunity."

The jester went. A girl was then presented to the Sultan's gaze.

"Nay, this is not my grandchild, or the jânn \* have changed her quite. I cannot trace the shadow of a likeness to our people. This is a child of Irak or Esh-Shâm."

"Thou speakest truth, O monarch of the age. This girl is a Shâmîyeh. I brought her hither but to test thy keen discernment."

The Sheykh Salâmah knew the haughty children of the desert. The Sultan of the Bani Sôr was flattered and amused.

"I do not swear that I could pick her out among a thousand, for Allah knows she may have altered in these years," he said. "But try me further, an it please thee, O my soul. I think that I could pick her out from among ten."

The Sheykh Salâmah again clapped his hands. Another girl was brought. The Sultan of the Bani Sôr stared hard at her, then caught her in his arms.

"This and no other is my girl," he cried, "the daughter of my lost Mudallaleh. Say, have I chosen right, O sea of learning?"

"Thou hast chosen right. It is Yasminah. She is thine. Thus ends my guardianship, of which I am prepared to render thee a full account."

"Nay, the debt is on my side. All that I have were not enough to pay it."

"Say no more!" exclaimed the Sheykh Salâmah with a deprecating gesture. He received the presents which the Sultan offered with well-feigned indifference, betraying by no sign his recognition of their value. They were indeed so valuable as to compensate him for the money he had plotted to extort from Prince Jeyyâsh. It was with the glow of a good deed performed that he resigned Yasmînah to her grandfather; and the ardour of that glow was not diminished by the secret thought of how Jeyyâsh would suffer when he knew her gone.

The girl too suffered. She was loath to leave a city which was now the shrine of all her hope in life. She wept much at the parting from her young companions and the older women; but her tears were for herself and not for them.

"Poor jewel! We are strangers yet, she has no knowledge of us," said the Sultan of the Bani Sôr to Abu Dad with vast indulgence. "Wait but a little. She will learn our love for her, and then the sense of kindred will revive her blood."

They remained in the city but the time to rest their camels, and then set out on their return to Wadi Ahmad.



## XXXIX

ABU DAD went with them aimlessly. He had no love of the fatigue of riding on the burning plain, nor yet of the discomforts of a bivouac each night. He had no wish to go back to the Bani Sôr, although the Sultan did his utmost to entice him with all kinds of promises. And yet, upon the other hand, he had no longing for Dhu Jiblah and Mukarram's court. The visit to Zabîd, the glimpse of civilized, devout existence had revived his feelings of allegiance for his former patrons. But he had no wish to live dependent upon any one. His heart's desire was for a quiet life, which had become identified in his remembrance with the groves of Arka where he hoped to end his days. But how to get there unsuspected of Mukarram? He had left a wife behind him in Dhu Jiblah, for whose society he sometimes yearned—a hostage in the tyrant's hands. There were so many problems to be faced ; to every course discernible so many drawbacks, that he feared to think, postponing his resolve from day to day. And so he rode beside the Sultan of the Bani Sôr.

" Praise be to Allah ! " that old Bedawi exclaimed continually. " The honour of our tribe, so foully ravished from us, is restored. Aye, greater than the loveliness of our gazelle Mudallaleh is now the beauty of her fawn, the shy Yasmînah."

His men intoned in chorus : " Ma sh'Allah ! The

eyes of all the nations will be fixed on us. Her beauty will assuredly distract the world."

They all rejoiced, but still the object of their joy remained a prey to grief. In that condition she felt naturally drawn towards one whose kindness she had known of old, and the Sultan of the Bani Sôr encouraged Abu Dad to talk apart with her, bidding him do his utmost to dispel her sorrow. By force of gentle questions he at length discovered the whole secret of her misery. She was in love. The name of her beloved was unknown; but from her clear description of the man—a man of lofty rank and of a black complexion, a poet and a singer to the lute—the jester felt quite sure that it was Prince Jeyyâsh. Great joy suffused his frame. He bade her hope, for he himself would be the messenger of her desires. The effect of this assurance and his pleasure was miraculous. Her tears ceased flowing; and a little later, in the tent, he heard her singing softly to herself.

That night he sought her grandfather and told him: "It is as I thought. The maiden is in love. She drags a chain, her loved one being there behind us, in Zabîd. But be not wroth with her; rather rejoice, for from her shy disclosures I believe that from this love of hers will spring a tree of honour shading half mankind."

"The youth is then a person of consideration?" asked the Sultan, frowning.

"No greater in the world, or I am much mistaken! She does not know his name. Her love for him is the result of an intrigue of one of those vile hags who haunt the city. Her guardian knew nought of it. Yet out of dung have grown the finest flowers. Unless she errs in her descriptions, her unknown lover is no other than the Prince Jeyyâsh, that pearl of learning and of chivalry, own brother to the king. With thy permission I set out to-morrow for the city to verify

this guess of mine and to inform the prince, who will approach thee honourably with his supplication. So thy darling shall be healed."

The eyes of the old Sultan blazed with pride a moment; then were downcast, as he caressed his flowing beard. He said fastidiously:

"But is he not a black man and of servile origin?"

"So was the mighty Antar, yet he wedded Ablah."

"Aye, in the end; but Allah knows he had to toil for her. Will this man bear as much for our Yasmînah? We shall see."

"The prince, like Antar, has in him some Arab blood."

"Najâh, his father, was a man of valour and renown," the Sultan mused. "His fame has reached us in the Wadi Ahmad. And I have heard a good report of this Jeyyâsh. I say not but that, if he send a proper embassy—one to exalt us in the sight of all the nations—we might consider his demand with favour. It is Yasmînah's inclination for him, not his honour, which impels us thus to overlook his fault of birth."

Abu Dad bore the news of this concession straightway to Yasmînah, whose joy and gratitude on the occasion moved the Sultan to command him: "Go at once, this very night! I would not have her happiness delayed. The women of our house are eager lovers."

He then bestowed on Abu Dad the camel he had ridden on the journey, and, having watched him mount, cried out, "God speed thee!" The beast set off with giant strides, and Abu Dad was soon alone beneath the stars.

Seven days later, in the afternoon, he reached Zabîd. Leaving his camel at a hostelry within the gate, he went into a mosque to pray, and then resorted to the house of Kheyr-ud-dîn in search of news. Being

a cautious man, he wished to ascertain the whereabouts and present disposition of Jeyyâsh before repairing to the palace.

The captain of the showmen had aged greatly. Abu Dad would not have known him had they met at unawares. And Kheyr-ud-dîn for his part gaped upon his visitor, believing him at first to be an utter stranger. When recognition came there was much joyful exclamation. The meeting of those ancient enemies was sweet to both of them.

"By Allah, I believe that I have not set eyes upon thee since a certain morning when thou camest to me with a tale about a girl, thy ward? It was feared that she was in the household of the Sheykh Salâmah. Didst ever find her? Is she still alive?"

"Praise be to Allah, she is now a maid full grown; and has been happily restored to her own people."

"Praise to Allah!"

They spoke of former days, of the great sights and festivals which had graced the city in the reign of King Najâh, of Saïd's return and that wild raid upon Al Mahjam, of Saïd's triumph—all the memories they had in common. At length the jester said:

"I come upon an errand to my lord Jeyyâsh. Is he at present in the city? in good health?"

Kheyr-ud-dîn shook his head and smiled, as he replied:

"Aye, he is in the city, I believe. But as to health, he has been ill these many days."

"May Allah heal him! I am grieved to hear it."

"Grieve not overmuch; for his disease is one that thou and I, old men, would most desire."

"He is in love; is that thy meaning? With him it is indeed an illness; I have known him in that state. Then I am glad of his condition, for I bring the remedy. It is a strange thing, O my dear, that I am talking here

to thee upon this matter ; for the girl who has enslaved our lord Jeyyâsh is the same whom I was seeking on the day when last we met."

"Merciful Allah ! A strange thing, in truth ! Then thou art sure of honours, since the girl is thine."

"She is no longer mine ; have I not told thee ? I have restored her to her grandfather, a mighty Sultan of the Arabs. In this affair I am his messenger and nothing more."

"There is a mystery in this infatuation of the Prince Jeyyâsh. The girl appeared to him at first upon a housetop, in the keeping of a loose old woman named Umm Hîlah. As soon as he took fire, she was withdrawn from him ; then shown again, and then again withdrawn. Many there are who think she was the weapon of some plot. I myself thought so, going on the evidence of one Mannullah, a member of our guild, Umm Hîlah's brother. I had even come to fancy that the father of the trouble was the Sheykh Salâmah, but since thou sayest that the girl is honourable, I give up the riddle. The Sheykh Abdul Halîm it was who set me on to make inquiry. He loves our lord Jeyyâsh, and he loves chess exceedingly ; and is deprived of both while our lord's madness lasts. They used to play for two hours every evening. He put into my head the notion that the culprit was Salâmah, whom he hates ; although the man, I think, is well enough."

"How is our great historian ? " asked Abu Dad.

"The same as ever ! He comes hither often, to denounce to me the folly of the king and all his counsellors. He seems to think that he alone should be consulted. He says that now that, by good luck not merit, Saïd has the kingdom well established, he must be guided by the rules of science, or else ruin all. Science ! Historic science ! Art of politics ! Those are the words he dins into my patient ears. Yesterday

he said : ' The king is intriguing with the Sheykh of Akd and other people in the highlands. Is it not so ? ' I denied it flatly, though, between ourselves, there was some truth in his assertion. He cried out : ' I know it. Let them not imagine they can hide such things from me. The king relies upon those ruffians, who are secret enemies, rather than on me, who am the builder of his throne.' He really thinks that we, the party of Najâh, owe all to him ; though Allah knows that all we have achieved has been against his counsel. A most impracticable man, yet not unkindly."

As Abu Dad returned into the city in the evening light, brooding upon the recollections which this talk had roused in him, he saw the great historian himself upon an ass just like the one he used to ride, and with the same gruff servant, Khâlid, in attendance. He was evidently going to the house of Kheyr-ud-dîn, and his demeanour advertised some private grievance. Abu Dad, in passing, wished him a good evening, and the Sheykh returned his greeting without recognition.

He prayed at sunset in the mosque of Ibrahîm, whence he proceeded to the palace in the growing night. A half-hour later he was seated with Jeyyâsh upon the terrace overlooking all Zabîd ; and the next day's dawn beheld him in the same position, conversing with Jeyyâsh and his adherent Khalf, who about midnight had been summoned to their council.

" The Sultan of the Bani Sôr is proud like all the Arabs," Abu Dad was saying. " He will expect a splendid embassy and many gifts. I entreat thee, stand not forward personally in the matter, or he will think of thee as one of small account."

This was in answer to Jeyyâsh's oft-repeated declaration that he must go himself to claim Yasmînah from her grandfather.

" The advice is good," said Khalf. " But in the

case of one like our good lord, advice is but an offering of friendship, subject to his will."

"My will then is to go," Jeyyâsh said doggedly.

"The plan has this advantage," murmured the vizier, "that we can thus dispense with half the retinue and cost, since any deputation headed by our lord himself is more magnificent than one without his presence. A letter from the king must be obtained, conceived in terms to flatter this wild chief. And I myself intend to go with you that men may say, 'The prince and his Wazîr have come.'"

"My brother will not let thee go. He is too busy at this moment with his schemes of conquest."

"I think otherwise. It has been my sad misfortune, in the course of duty, to give offence by opposition to those schemes of his; expressing what I knew to be thy views, since thou wast not in council. The schemes proceed in spite of me, and I would fain depart before their execution. The king too, as I think, would fain be rid of me."

"Then be it so!" exclaimed Jeyyâsh impatiently.

"God knows I cannot bear inaction for much longer."

"In a week's time we can be ready."

"Be it so! Meanwhile I shall compose a song of love."

But, as it happened, in that week events occurred which gave Jeyyâsh no leisure for his poetry. The Sheykh Selîm of Akd arrived, the bearer of a letter from the highlands, and thereafter there was no repose for the unlucky prince. His brother was for ever sending for him to some secret council; at which, when he appeared, he angered Saïd by breathing prudence and distrust of highland overtures—useless protests, since the rest supported Saïd's ambitions through obsequiousness. Khalf alone held firmly with Jeyyâsh. Saïd frowned on both of them, and said that he would bless the day when they departed

on their girl-hunt as he called it. Sâlihah sought the counsel of the prince, confessing to him that her brother's coming much alarmed her. Selîm, she said, was far from friendly in reality. His talk with her was all about the slights he had received, declaring that he should have had an escort and a great reception, as a sovereign's envoy, whereas they treated him no better than some base adherent. The honour of the noble house of Akd was his perpetual theme. The Sheykh of Akd, he boasted, was no partisan, but an ally.

Knowing her jealousy for Saïd's honour, the prince, who listened with but half his mind, discounted much of what she said, and attributed the rest to Arab boasting. In his own talks with Sheykh Selîm he found the young man amiable, though always with the point of gruffness which he knew so well. They were a cross-grained race, unstable and untrustworthy. But he saw no reason for particular alarm at present. He had read the letter from the prince of Shaïr to the king and found no fault with it except that it proposed an act of treachery. He thought it likely that, with such base aid, Saïd might succeed in extirpating the Suleyhi. It was therefore without much anxiety on his account, but rather with relief at leaving schemes which he considered sinful and giving his whole mind to love, that he set out one morning amid fond farewells from all the household and rode with Abu Dad and Khalf out of the southern gate. His sole regret was on account of Malak, whom he felt that he had much neglected in his new desire. He asked forgiveness for that dereliction, and all the other products of his madness, often as he rode across the glaring plain, shrouding his face in the great Arab head-shawl.



## XL

THE Sheykh Selîm of Akd stayed in Zabîd ten days, and then rode back towards the highlands bearing Saïd's answer to the prince of Shaîr. During her brother's visit Sâlihah had seen but little of the king, who was absorbed in business, for ever holding consultations with Jeyyâsh and, after his departure, with the Sheykh Salâmah. The tone adopted by Selîm in their few talks had much displeased her ; and she felt truly glad when he was gone. He had spoken of her husband in a way that made her boil with anger ; but the stupefying dread, a legacy of her subservient childhood, which always seized her in her brother's presence, had prevented her from manifesting her great love for Saïd. So he had gone away with the impression that she did not care. The thought appalled her, while the king's excitement in his warlike preparations, which could not be kept altogether hid from her, distressed her spirit with forebodings of some great calamity. She thought of writing to her brother in defence of Saïd, until she recollected, with a bitter laugh, that the most noble Sheykhs of Akd had not been taught to read. She tried to keep a cheerful countenance before the king ; but one day, coming suddenly to her apartments, he found her weeping, and inquired the cause. Confessing her own cowardice in never standing up for him against Selîm, she wept anew. It seemed to her a treachery. He laughed, and would have kissed her, but she sprang away.

"They do not love thee," she exclaimed with passion; "and I adjure thee, put no trust in them, nor in their tidings. . . . God help me and forgive me if I sin! They are my people, yet my feeling is, they will betray thee."

"Fear nothing, O beloved!" he made answer cheeringly. "I trust them not; but hold them as the skilful rider holds his horse, in curb. As for their manner of contempt for me in private, God made them so! Does not the meanest scarecrow of a mountaineer think himself much superior to us whose sires were freedmen? The light of El Islâm has never reached their conscience. They are still entrenched in pride of race as in the time of Ignorance. One to whom Allah has confided high dominion, as of His mercy He has done to me, can well afford to let them have their sneer. Fear nothing from this coming expedition. I hold them fast, I tell thee, by the reins of interest. Are they not poor?"

"Is the expedition then so near?" wailed out the mother of Muarik.

"Why, yes; since thou must know. But keep the secret. The news of our intention must not get abroad. We set out with a light force of two thousand men, each soldier carrying a week's provision. Within the week, in sh'Allah, we shall be possessors of Dhu Jiblah, and the enemies of our security will be destroyed. . . . Seek not to dissuade me, O my treasure! Not for the world would I renounce this project. The Learned, if they knew of it, would blame me, saying I do wrong to make aggression and attack without declaring war beforehand by a herald. In all my combats hitherto, they own, though grudgingly, that I have had the sanction of the law which bids a man retaliate the wrong received. Say, is it not retaliation to extinguish those who, in the past, have done their utmost to extinguish us, and still are planning our

destruction? Mukarram, in his drunken orgies, swears continually that he will make an end of us upon the first occasion; and all the schemes of Sayyidah are for our ruin. Is it not, therefore, right to take them by surprise, before their plans are ripe? Besides, I weary of this life of luxury, this dwelling behind curtains like a girl. My song is that of Antar:

' Let me die in battle honourably,  
For honoured death is better than such living.  
Faith, Glory is not in the hoard of pelf,  
Nor is the rich man ranked with heroes doughty.  
As long as life and death are in this world  
The dust of battles will revive my memory,  
A fame enduring, never-fading, green  
Through all the days wherein men come and go.'

I too, like Antar, am a warrior of the sons of Ham; like him, a striver. I count life worthless which is free from risk."

Sâlihah still besought him to give up the expedition, or at least postpone it. He replied with more of Antar, reminding her of how Zabîbah, the old negress, Antar's mother, used to entreat him in the selfsame way, and of his answers; laughing at her woman's fear. The present undertaking was a light one, fraught with no more than that spice of danger which makes life enjoyable.

"Mukarram, a gross sot," he said, "is quite immersed in pleasure, and Sayyidah has yet no knowledge that the prince of Shaîr and others of her stalwarts are in league with us. What can they do to parry a surprise attack? What makes thee fear? Be reasonable, O beloved!"

The expedition was so easy, he declared at length with smiles that, if she cared to do so, she might join it. He took her in his arms and cried:

"Will that content thee? Wilt condescend to honour our poor camp?"

She danced for joy, scarce able to believe her ears.

Misgivings, fears, were lost in ecstasy. She was as eager to be gone as Saïd himself.

The army started in the night, for secrecy. The king and queen, with a small retinue, set out at dawn. To please her, since she was a daughter of the hills, Saïd had her mounted on a handsome palfrey, and that first morning let her ride beside him, in the manner of the desert Arabs. A gauze veil hid her face up to the eyes, beneath the flowing head-shawl. She held a lance, of which the weight was borne by a stout leather pocket hanging from the saddle. They overtook the army at the noonday halt beside a stream meandering across the plain with fringe of greenery. They were greeted with a blast of horns, a shout of welcome. The presence of the lady was acclaimed as of good omen, implying that the expedition would be free from hardship. The royal party took refreshment in the shade of trees, and then Saïd left her to proceed with her own escort, himself adhering thenceforth to the army leaders. But she had never known so bright a day.

Arriving tired at the evening halt, expecting a rough couch, she was surprised to find a grand pavilion, divided in two parts by hanging tapestries, where some of her own maids were waiting to disrobe her. Later, a feast composed of all her favourite dishes was served to her. She lay to rest upon a bed of down with silken coverings. Her soul was reassured by all this luxury which savoured rather of a hunting-party than rough war. The risks her lord incurred could not be great, she reasoned gladly, and so fell asleep.

But in her sleep she dreamed a dream. It seemed to her that she was bathing in a pleasant pool remote from everywhere, when suddenly her father and her brothers stood upon the bank beside her, pointing with their fingers, making her ashamed. They seemed to gloat upon her nakedness, exclaiming: "She is

ripe for marriage. We will give her to the prince of Shaïr"—a man she hated. She cried out, weeping, that she was already married to the king of men; they paid no heed. Then she remembered that she had not yet proclaimed to them her love for Saïd. She strove to do so, but her tongue was like a stone. The effort caused her anguish, but had no result save to enrage her brothers, who cast on her a look of hate, and snarled: "Beware!" They pointed with their fingers once again, but she was clothed. Waking, she tried to rouse her lord by calling softly, but could not, and so went to sleep again. Now she was in her chamber in the town of Dahlak—the room whose window looked through palm trees to the sea. There was her son Muarik, not as she had known him, but a youth full grown with down upon his lip. They were conversing happily when all at once he turned and looked at her with mournful eyes, and said: "Beware!" There followed darkness and a rush of wings, a long, long fall, and then she was awake.

Again she called to Saïd. He heard her now, and asked what ailed her. Relating her two dreams, she said: "I fear disaster."

He replied: "And if thy fear were true, it is from Allah. No man knows his end. And I have always hoped that mine would come upon me suddenly, amid the shouting and the dust of battle. But in our present exploit—as I tell thee for the hundredth time—there is no danger."

"For thee it is so easy," she exclaimed. "Thy life is all thine own, and thou canst give it freely. For me, my life is thine, and without thee I should be dead though living."

"Nay," said he; "O beloved, art thou not a Muslimah, and truly pious, so my brother tells me? Say, does Allah make distinction between man and woman. Is not each quite independent in His sight—

I mean, as regards the next world and the way which leads to it? Surely His mercy will be on thee, when I die, and thou wilt not despair like a weak, faithless soul. I do not speak of such things well or readily. Jeyyâsh, my brother, is a better preacher. But I know that this world passes. Then will come the day of meeting with the Lord, the day of reckoning, when thou and I shall stand or fall by our own doings, separately. And then, if God so wills it, I will ask for thee in paradise."

"Forget not! Promise that!" she whispered coaxingly. "What should I be without thee, even there?"

On the next day she was quite happy, riding in the sunlight, and on the following night she had no evil dreams. Upon the next day also she was in good spirits till towards evening, when she became a prey to strange uneasiness. They were by that time in the mountains. She kept looking back, distressed by the idea that some one followed them. It may have been a mere impression of the barren heights, which seemed to her at times to be endowed with motion, closing in behind them like a wall to cut them off.

That night she slept but fitfully, and talked much in her sleep. In a waking moment Saïd told her:

"Thou hast been crying that an army is behind us. Thou spakest also of a cloud of vultures covering the sun. Be the omen of thy dreaming far from us!"

"I dreamt that a great host of foes was close behind us."

"A host is close before us, but of friends; for on this coming day we make our junction with the prince of Shaïr."

"May the meeting be auspicious!" sighed the mother of Muarik.

Before the dawn Saïd started with the army;

bidding his beloved rest until the sun appeared. He left with her a guard of mail-clad lancers. But after he was gone she was afflicted with a sense of loneliness so intense that she arose and mounted, and was on the road not more than half an hour behind her lord. The stony mountains in the twilight grinned like skulls. A heavy load depressed her heart. It was not lifted till the sun swung clear of the great cliffs, to eastward, restoring colour to that wilderness. Then gradually she regained her normal spirits, and could smile at her misgivings of the night.

It was the second hour of day when, riding round the base of a projecting bluff, she saw the fort of Shaïr on a height beyond a little plain, in which Saïd's army rested, facing the army of Huseyn of Shaïr. The leaders were in council in the space between. The Abyssinian troops had piled their arms, and sat or lay on the rough ground, keeping an eye upon the horses munching herbage here and there. The morning shadows still hung curtains from the sunlit heights.

A horseman rode up to her escort, bringing word from Saïd that she should go to a pavilion pitched for her reception on a rising ground from whence she could survey the field.

"We start at night to reach Dhu Jiblah at the dawn. All is prepared. The city will be taken easily. We rest throughout to-day," she heard men saying, as they ushered her into the tent which marked her journey's end; for it had been arranged that in this spot she should await her lord's return from the assault upon Dhu Jiblah.

Having put foot to ground, she stood in the tent mouth, enjoying every detail of the martial scene; for was she not a daughter of the Arabs? She marked with pride the manifest advantage in appearance which her husband's troops possessed over the vassals of the lord of Shaïr. The latter, though more numerous

and fitly armed, appeared no better than a host of ragamuffins.

Then all at once, as she stood gazing, there arose confusion there below, an awful din. In a flash she knew the meaning of the uproar; it tallied with her premonitions. Treachery! The army of the prince of Shaïr, kept in ranks, had fallen on the army of Zabîd dispersed at ease. With one hand she clutched her heart; the other shaded her great eyes, intent to pierce the dust cloud which had suddenly obscured the plain.

"Our Lord destroy them! Treason! Treason!" cried the troopers of her guard, forgetting her in their excitement. With a shout, "Allahu Akbar!" they struck spurs into their horses, and galloped headlong down upon the dogs of Shaïr. Sâlihah would fain have done the same.

Although the Abyssinian army had been taken unawares and was outnumbered, it rallied well, and might have gained the day. Sâlihah from prayers had passed to thanks to Allah; when shouts from down the wady gave new courage to the traitors. And then she knew the meaning of her dream. A second army, still more numerous than that of Shaïr, appeared upon the road which she herself had lately travelled; green pennons floating from the lances announced the champion of the Obeydite, Mukarram es-Suleyhi.

The Abyssinians were surrounded. There was no escape. She sought Saïd's head-dress in the dust of battle, till from the very effort she could see no more, but swooned away.

When at length her eyes reopened on the fearful scene, the slaughter still went on, the circle of destruction narrowing. A little band of Abyssinians who had managed to break through, were surrounded as they climbed the rocks and butchered every one.

The slaying lasted until after noon. When there



were no more left to kill, the armies of Mukarram and the false Huseyn went up to rest around the fort of Shaïr. Sâlihah wandered down among the slain, although her handmaids and a eunuch tried to stop her. After much search she found Saïd's body in a circle of dead enemies. One of these lay right across the king. By dint of patient efforts she succeeded in removing this intruder. Then she knelt down beside her lord. She loosed his helm. She took his head upon her lap, and talked to him in secret tones. And so she sat, it seemed for minutes only, till suddenly she heard her father's voice exclaiming :

"It is my daughter, Umm Muarik, O our sovereign lord ! A good girl, by Allah. But for her assistance we might have spent the whole night long in searching for him through these heaps of carrion."

"Umm Muarik is my prisoner," a voice replied. "By the law of retaliation she should have the treatment which the Squinter gave my mother."

"But think, my lord. She is my daughter, one of us !"

Other voices joined the conversation. There was laughter, then her brother's voice, commanding :

"Stand aside, O Sâlihah."

She gazed upon the scene with stupid eyes, and while so doing loosed her hold of Saïd's body. The next thing that she knew, Selîm, her brother, was holding up the severed head of her beloved, with its face towards hers.

"One last kiss !" he implored facetiously.

"Let be !" exclaimed the Sheykh of Akd with sudden rage, for to his shame and horror he perceived that Sâlihah was actually going to kiss that ghastly object. Selîm withdrew it from her suddenly, and she fell forward, senseless. The Sheykh of Akd then turned to Al Mukarram, saying : "Take her, O lord of Sanaa and Dhu Jiblah ! Deal as thou wilt with her. She is no child of mine."

## XLI

JEYYÂSH and the Wazîr Khalf rode towards the south, and Abu Dad rode with them many days, as he had ridden with the Sultan of the Bani Sôr, from mere reluctance to resume a settled life beset with cares ; until they reached the gardens of a certain village where they pitched their camp. The first part of the night, as usual, was spent in conversation. The sense of speeding towards his heart's desire and the fatigues of travel, had healed in some degree the prince's madness. He could now talk sensibly of things of earth ; and, when they rested, he would speak with Abu Dad of past adventures, for the information of the Omeyyad, who had expressed a wish to write the history of the Abyssinian dynasty.

On this occasion he induced the jester to tell the story of his life at Sanaa and Dhu Jiblah, which interested both the hearers deeply, for the light it threw upon the characters of Al Mukarram and the Lady Sayyidah. In the progress of the narrative he came to tell how he had once remarked, half jesting, in the presence of the king and other highland chiefs, that every Sunnite would prefer a Sunnite ruler, such as Saïd the Clever, to a heretic ; and how his audience laughed uproariously at the notion, although the most of them were of the Sunnite way of thought.

Hearing this, Jeyyâsh and Khalf looked hard at one another ; then the prince exclaimed :

“ But it is true that Sunnites everywhere prefer a Sunnite lord ! ”

"It is true, O lord of wisdom, of the people of Te-hâmah and, for aught I know, of Muslims everywhere, except these highland clans. They are so inflated with the pride of race that El Islâm itself is second to their genealogies. True, they fight among themselves. They have the proverb: 'I am against my brother; I and my brother are against my cousin; I and my brother and my cousin are against the stranger.' They are all as one in their disdain of other peoples; and they would sooner bow to one of their own kindred, though a pagan, than to the most sincere of true believers if of alien blood."

"Then is my brother much deceived," replied Jeyyâsh in great dismay, while Khalf pursed up his mouth and frowned forebodingly. "Proceed, O best of tellers, with thy story."

"The chieftain who appeared of all the most amused was one Huseyn, the prince of Shaïr, who is the right hand of the Lady Sayyidah, himself a Sunnite. He cried out, laughing, that it was a bright idea and might be serviceable. And I well remember how, a long while after, as I was coming from the presence of the queen, having at last received permission to depart for Wadi Ahmad in pursuance of my vow, I met this prince of Shaïr in the ante-chamber. He laughed again about my notion of a Sunnite rising. He clapped me on the shoulder and again declared it was a bright idea.

"Then, O my lords, I started for the Wadi Ahmad, with my guide and camels and my armed attendants, like a little prince; leaving my wife—poor soul!—behind there in Dhu Jiblah . . ."

Abu Dad was launched on this new chapter of his story before he realized that his two hearers were no longer listening. They were looking now at one another, now at the ground, with faces of the utmost consternation.

"O Lord of mercy and compassion!" groaned Jeyyâsh. "Where have my wits been all this while, when so much needed? A plot—a simple plot—and I did not detect it! I scarcely heeded what my brother told me of the matter, so engrossed were all my faculties by selfish love. God grant that it be not too late to save the kingdom! O Allah, give me time to make amends for my neglect of duty. My friends, we must turn back immediately. Let my desire consume me! Love must wait!"

Abu Dad, bewildered, asked to know the cause of their concern. Khalf it was who told him that the king had made alliance with the prince of Shaîr who had promised him the help of all the highland Sunnites to destroy Dhu Jiblah.

"Merciful Allah!" cried the jester wildly. "Why did I not hear of this while I was in Zabîd? I could have told the king the truth about that man and his designs. God grant indeed that it be not too late! Of a truth, we must return and that with speed."

They set out at the dawn upon their homeward way, an anxious group of riders, sparing no fatigue which tended to reduce the distance from the capital. At every village, every camp of nomads, they sought tidings from Zabîd, but there were none. At length, when they had come within a four days' journey of the city, at a village of the foothills, they were told that a great army from the highlands, led by the king Mukarram Ahmad, had passed near the place towards sunset of the day before; that men who had been sent to watch its movements from a distance declared no damage had been done to crops or cattle, and that the army, after going down a little way into the plain, had returned into the mountains by another pass. The spies had followed to the entrance of that pass where a shepherd-boy upon the heights had shouted to them that another host composed of black

men, having women with them, had taken the same way the day before.

"O Allah, speed our going!" cried Jeyyâsh, "for there may yet be time, if not to save my brother, to be slain with him."

Taking a guide from that village they travelled through the night. When day appeared, and their guide left them, they found themselves in a ravine of tawny rocks where, in the wady, water lay in little pools. Beneath a solitary tree, whose shadow in that sun-baked land was like a blot of ink on yellow parchment, they rested through the noonday heat, then journeyed on, resting again about the middle of the night. At dawn they came upon a camping-place, though whether of the Abyssinians or the Arabs none could tell. In the afternoon they found another, but though they pored a long while on the traces, seeking some clue among the ashes of the worn-out fires, none could be certain to which army they belonged. They waited on the spot until the cool of evening, then advanced again until the second hour of night, when they dismounted and lay down to rest. All were weary, and they slept until the sun's first rays awoke them. The tumbled crags around them were decked in gorgeous colours underneath a turquoise sky.

"Look!" suddenly exclaimed the prince. He pointed up into the blue.

High in the clear light a bird was flying, straight in the direction of their road. It was a vulture. Another was seen winging from the south. They strained their eyes and saw the great birds beating up from all directions, converging on a certain point where they swooped downward one by one. That point was just beyond the bluff which seemed to close the valley to the eastward. They rode towards it, and the valley opened out, the bluff appearing as a promontory. They travelled round its base, when all

at once they saw the fort of Shaïr on the hill before them, and, between, a little plain alive with crows and vultures.

The servants wailed aloud in apprehension. Khalf imposed silence on them, saying : " There are enemies, for sure, in yonder fort. Wouldst tell them of our coming ? Stop that noise ! "

" Alas ! " bemoaned the prince. " Let us draw near and look. It may be that we are deceived. God grant it be so ! "

But one glance at the ghastly heaps sufficed. Black skins predominated. Jeyyâsh fell down and ground his face upon the stones. After a space of prayer he sat and, weeping, gazed upon the scene. The others watched him from a distance. Then he sang :

' In seeking out the traces of her camp-fires,  
Tracking her camel's hoofprints in the sand,  
Weeping, my soul forgot the path of honour,  
And the fierce joy of meeting sword with sword.  
O maid with great black eyes and curling lashes,  
A sickness from thy glance distracted me,  
While he, my brother, he, who laughed at danger,  
Was snared and ambushed by the treacherous foe.  
Ill was his counsel and his plan unlawful;  
Yet to desert a brother is not well.  
O God, that I had shared the blame, had died beside him,  
Rather than live alone with this remorse ;  
That I had heard the clash of arms in this last battle,  
The cries amid the dust-cloud on the plain ;  
That I had slain a hundred of the wolves of Shaïr  
Before we fell together, he and I !  
What is the joy in love and maiden's beauty  
Beside the joy of death on such a field !  
O clear refulgent spirit, O my brother,  
How bright is thy renown, how dark my life ! "

He ceased, and fell with face upon the ground once more.

Then, in spite of all that the Wazîr Khalf and Abu Dad and the men of his retinue could say to dissuade him, he went to seek the body of his brother. A night had passed since the great slaughter, and the prowlers

in the dark, the jackals and hyenas, had dragged and torn the corpses here and there where now the carrion birds were gorging, some so full that they could scarcely flap their wings at the approach of man. The guards amused themselves by spearing them while Jeyyâsh and his two friends pursued their search among the dead. At length they found a headless corpse, much mangled, which Khalf identified by some peculiarities of clothing. They had much ado to scare away the vultures, some of which showed fight.

"They have borne his head to Sanaa or Dhu Jiblah, even as he took the head of Ali to Zabîd," exclaimed Jeyyâsh. "Thus are men's errors and excesses made to balance by the decree of One Above, to Whom be praise. May this erase the score against my brother! May his good outweigh his evil at the reckoning! He was the lord of kindness and of charity. His faults proceeded from that reckless spirit which was his from birth. God knows that he was not ambitious like the hypocrites and oppressors; but like an eager boy he never saw a height but he must straightway climb it, to see what lay beyond."

He flung his cloak upon the body for a winding sheet. Some soldiers bore it to the torrent bed, where were pools of water, while others dug a grave among the loose stones of the bank, in which was laid the remnant of King Saïd. They filled it in with earth and rolled great stones upon it.

All this while no sound or sign of human life had reached them from the fort of Shaïr. It was not until the sun began to dip to westward that one of them espied a shepherd on the rocks above the village, descending towards it with his flock behind him.

"Allah knows that I have nought to fear henceforward," said the prince. "The utmost anguish of this world is past for me. I will go up and hear the story of the fight. Yon shepherd will inform us."

They tried to turn him from his purpose, but in vain, and in the end they all went up with him. At their approach some children ran out of the village, followed more sedately by some women and a few old men. The shepherd was no more in sight. Jeyyâsh called out to know the meaning of the corpses in the plain below, and one of the old men went off towards the castle, exclaiming he would fetch the regent who knew everything. In the meanwhile Khalf addressed the staring women :

" They took the head of Saïd the Squinter to Dhu Jiblah, is it not so ? "

" By Allah, yes ; and Umm Muarik too ! "

" Was Umm Muarik with him ? " cried Jeyyâsh in so concerned a tone that, though his face was muffled, Khalf was fearful of discovery.

" Wallahi ! " answered several voices in a breath. " She it was who found the head for them. They never would have got it but for her. She—poor, unhappy one!—distraught with grief for him she loved, discovered it and nursed it in her lap, making its position clear as does a written headstone to a grave. She likewise has been taken to Dhu Jiblah."

" Just as the Lady Asma was taken by King Saïd to Zabîd," muttered Jeyyâsh with hanging head. " The head of Saïd will be set up beneath her window. May God give her strength ! Thus all things move to just conclusions. Praise to Allah ! "

The man they called the regent came down from the fort—a person of superior rank, who was at first obsequious and manifestly nervous at the sight of well-armed men. But recognizing Abu Dad, he lost his fear, remarking gladly :

" Have I not seen your honour in the presence of our lord Mukarram ? "

" It is true," said Abu Dad.

" Then all is well." And he proceeded to inform



them that the best part of Mukarram's army, together with the forces of the prince of Shaïr, were advancing on Zabîd by way of the Red Pass, while a detachment only had returned towards Dhu Jiblah. Khalf, in the meanwhile, drew near to the prince and whispered :

"Here now is vengeance if thy soul desires it. With the force at our disposal we can slaughter all these people and destroy the place of Shaïr."

"God forbid!" replied Jeyyâsh. "To do so would once more disturb the balance, which is now adjusted. The Lord forgive me, I had thought of it!"

They thanked the regent for his information, and were sped with blessings as they rode away. They journeyed towards the Red Pass for two hours and then, in a convenient place, dismounted for the night. It was here that one of the troopers, taking orders from Jeyyâsh, replied, "To hear is to obey, O monarch of the age"—a manner of address reserved for sovereigns. The doleful prince was struck by this response, and sat for some time thoughtful in his tent. Then he remarked to Khalf and Abu Dad: "That man spoke truth; I am indeed the king. The burden, which was once my brother's, is now mine. My poet's dreams, my studious privacy, are at an end. I must henceforward care for all the realm. My friends, we must press forward to Zabîd, and, if it may be, raise the spirits of the army."

Khalf praised this resolution highly, and therewith did homage; but Abu Dad, who had no taste for warfare, said :

"O monarch of the age, I crave permission to depart to-morrow to a village not far distant, where for a few months I enjoyed the only quiet life that I have known from childhood. The spot is hallowed in my memory. Thence I will send a message for my wife to join me. She too will be delighted to return to calm."

“Go with Allah’s blessing and my gratitude,” exclaimed Jeyyâsh. “The Lord of Heaven and Earth reward thee goodness!”

Accordingly upon the morrow, when they came to the Red Pass, the party halted for a moment to take leave of the old jester, who rode off alone, with shrouded face, upon a track which there diverged from the main road, climbing among the rocks of porphyry, whose colour gave its name to the ravine. His form upon the camel was soon lost to sight, as Saïd and Khalf with their adherents swept onward down the rugged gorge towards Tehâmah.

## XLII

"THE army was defeated yesterday in a terrific battle this side of Tureybah. It retired upon the city, which is now besieged. We damaged men and stragglers were left behind."

They had the tidings from a group of Abyssinian soldiers, most of them wounded, who lay beneath a tree beside a spring, surrounded by a crowd of villagers. "It was their shouting, 'We have killed the Squinter,' not their strength, which overcame us. How could we win the day with hearts like lead? Hadst thou been there, O monarch of the age, we might have rallied, for thy sight is hope."

Jeyyâsh advised those derelicts to make their way as soon as might be to the coast, and there await the issue of the war. If things went ill, they should take ship to Dahlak; if well, they should come back into Zabîd. He bade them pass on his advice to other fugitives whom they might chance to meet; and this they promised faithfully to do.

Around the mosque of et-Tureybah, which they reached towards evening, were many camels couchant on the sand, with heaps of bales; and merchants and their servants were seated in the shade of the mosque walls. Three caravans, they learnt, had halted there on learning that Zabîd was closed for traffic. The merchants feared that they might have to wait for several days, and were concerned for the supply of food and fodder. Jeyyâsh and Khalf sat listening to their

grumbles for a while, surveying with sad eyes the peaceful scene ; the dimpled sand-dunes coloured by the sunset and the camels resting, under a clear sky. At length Khalf whispered with a shrug :

“ O monarch of the age, it is not safe for thee to linger here. Some of these people must have recognized us as belonging to Zabîd. Thy counsel to those fugitives was good, and I return it to thee : ‘ Go secretly to the seashore, and there await the news. If the news is bad, take ship to Africa ; if good, come back into Zabîd.’ ”

Jeyyâsh emitted a short laugh before he answered : “ That advice is for my people, not for me. If I can reach our army, there may yet be hope. Besides, I have a wife and children in the city, and my heart yearns to them. I mean to get into Zabîd this very night. Go thou to the sea-coast, and wait for news of me.”

“ Merciful Allah ! ” gasped the Omeyyad, deprived of breath. He sat a moment, staring straight before him. Then he said : “ Nay, I go with thee. It shall not be said that a Sherîf of the Coreysh shirked danger when a prince of the house of Najâh, a son of Ethiopian slaves, rode straight to meet it.”

“ As thou wilt,” replied the prince with some amusement in his tone. It was not the first time he had been reminded by a chance remark of the vizier that the latter was by birth his great superior. Pride in his ancestry was so complete in Khalf that he expressed it naturally and with perfect candour, often remarking on the wonder of the fact, that he, the scion of so great a house, should be dependent upon men of servile origin. He used it as an illustration of the power of God Who raises and abases whom He will.

They waited till the night had fully come before Jeyyâsh gave orders for the start. At a little distance from Tureybah, where there were no eavesdroppers,

he addressed his men, informing them of his design to enter the beleaguered city, and formally discharging them from further duty. They were free to go their way, he told them, adding the advice that they should travel to the coast, and there await the news. Not one of them agreed. Their leader, an old man, laughed out as he replied :

“ O king, thou art our father and our mother ; we would die for thee when thou art idle. When thou goest forth to fight, we follow thee, as to a festival, with praise to Allah.”

“ The Lord reward you, O my children,” the king answered. The bells were then removed from every camel’s neck and hidden in the sand.

They travelled on. The tops of many palm trees rose against the starry sky. Jeyyâsh cried halt, and sent two men ahead on foot to reconnoitre. With faces muffled in their shawls the others waited. An owl kept hooting near at hand. The darkness of the night had that mysterious quality which causes men to apprehend they know not what. One man whispered to his neighbour that he did not envy the unlucky two who had gone forward separately, and that was all the talk that passed among them, till the scouts returned.

They told how, stealing separately, they had gone unchallenged till within a long stone’s throw of the Tehâmah gate, when each at the same time had come upon a man and closed with him, before they recognized each other. The noise of their encounter in the darkness had evoked a challenge from some point between them and the city gate, where, so far as they could judge, there was a hostile force encamped. They had seen the watch-fires of the enemy on every side, but in the way to the Tehâmah gate was one fire only, near the walls and not far from the spot from which a voice had challenged them.

At the story of their struggle with each other, there was stifled mirth. Then all remounted. They advanced once more ; the king and Khalf with swords loose in the scabbard, the men with lances ready to be laid in rest ; through the deep palm-groves, where the camel's pads made hardly any sound in striking the soft earth, until they came to the clear space before the city wall, of which the towers and battlements were seen against the sky while all below was plunged in mystery. They were but thirty men, and it behoved them to be wary.

"There is the fire of which we told thee," whispered one of the two scouts, who served as guide, "and further to the left the spot whence we were challenged. The camp, therefore, extends to leftward of the fire ; perhaps to rightward also—Allah knows !"

"Bear to the right," the king commanded, "until near the wall, then turn and ride up to the gate. Put hope and fear alike behind you ! Charge !"

The men could not forgo a shout : "Allahu Akbar !" as they urged their camels forward upon this command. To Jeyyâsh and Khalf and all of them it seemed that in a moment they would reach the gate, when all at once the camels stumbled, stopped and swerved. One falling headlong, threw his rider to the ground. In the darkness they had ridden straight into a crowd of camels, horses, mules, all picketed. Terrific was the din. The hump-backed giants rose around them with blood-curdling groans, the stallions screamed and plunged, the mules kicked viciously.

With one man missing, they retired and made another charge still further to the right ; but the alarm was given, and long before they reached the walls they found themselves engaged in furious battle with a host they could not see till men came running up with torches lighted at the camp-fires. By that time they were close up to the gate, and could discern the

forms of watchers on the walls. Jeyyâsh cried up to them :

“Take courage, O my children ! I am Jeyyâsh. With God’s help, we will yet hurl back these savages. Keep the gate shut, or they will rush the town. They press between us and the gate. We must retire.”

Slowly the little band of heroes, the king leading, fought its way back through masses of the foe. Ere many minutes they were all dismounted, their camels being killed or hamstrung ; still they fought undaunted, befriended by the darkness and the very crowd of their opponents. Nine men only out of thirty won to safety. Jeyyâsh was bleeding from a score of wounds ; the Omeyyad’s white cloak was purple-stained and his head broken ; though neither of them knew it till the daylight came. It found them hiding in a garden near the river bank, the garden of the captain of the showmen in which King Saïd had hidden years ago. They bandaged up their wounds as best they could, then slept until the afternoon, when they took counsel as to what was next to do. Haggard, unkempt, with clothes all stained with blood, they lay in the shade of some pomegranate trees with eyes upon the ground. A noise of war came to them from the city, now loud, now soft, on waves of the hot air.

Jeyyâsh was resolute in his desire to stay in the immediate neighbourhood until the town capitulated or the siege was raised. They had crept into that garden under cover of the night, and could depart thence safely only in the darkness, for the enemy were all around them. It was agreed that they should steal forth after nightfall and try to reach a certain village two miles off, where they could get the news with more security.

Scarcely had they come to this decision when the garden door flew open and Kheyr-ud-dîn came running, followed by two other men who staggered in their gait.

At sight of people he seemed thunderstruck. Jeyyâsh called out to him by name to have no fear. Hearing that well-known voice, the showman started forward, but long before he reached the king, he reeled and fell. When Jeyyâsh leaned over him, he was incapable of speech, and, after some convulsive movement of the limbs, he died.

One of his companions told the king :

"The Arabs stormed the city. They had cut down palm trees with which they battered in the highland gate. That was at dawn. We have been fighting ever since. This righteous man now gone to Allah's mercy, though already old, was fighting like a lion to defend the royal house, and we were with him. When in spite of all that we could do they took the palace, which contained the royal ladies and their children, a madness came upon him and he fought his way right through the city to the further wall. We followed in his steps as close as could be, for in truth we saw him as one sent from God.

"There is a low part of the wall hard by the Maristan, and yet it seemed to us a dizzy height. Although he had been killed a hundred times, he took the leap ; and we, poor sons of Adam, followed his sublime example, all unthinking, so potent was the spell that he had cast upon us. Here in this garden is the end. Allah is greatest ! "

The speaker fell back on the ground and closed his eyes.

"Not in this garden, but in one more lovely shall ye dwell, where toil and trouble are not, and there is no end," replied Jeyyâsh. "The Lord have mercy on this faithful man, and us and all believers ! "

Then the king sat silent a long while, gazing at the ground before him with a face of stone. The royal place was captured. Malak and his three children, and his brother's child, with all the people



of his house, were taken prisoners. They might be sold for slaves—the mountain Arabs were barbarians—dispersed throughout the world, and he would never see them more. The royal treasure also had been taken. He was possessed of nothing in the world except the clothes he wore, and the presents once intended for the Sultan of the Bani Sôr, which he had hidden when he turned back towards the north. How distant from him now appeared Yasminâh ! His grief was all for Saïd and Sâlihah, and Malak and his pretty children lost. When Khalf said : “ We must fly this night towards Dahlak,” he replied : “ Those isles would kill me with the thought of happy days. To India, to the utmost rim of Earth, I go ; and let me, I beseech thee, go alone.”

“ By Allah, I will go with thee, no matter whither ! ” answered Khalf. “ God knows that all my hopes were fixed on thee, and I will not desert thee in misfortune. That would be unworthy of a man of noble race.”

He spoke as one who makes a sacrifice deserving honour and reward in this world and the next.

## XLIII

ON the day after the assault Abdul Halîm, the great historian, set out from his house about the third hour after noon for the mosque of Ibrahîm, where he was summoned to attend a convocation of the Learned. He was an old man, rather portly, and his limbs were stiff from his exertions of the day before, when, through zeal for the house of Najâh, he had so far forgotten his position as to ride about upon his ass, exhorting the defenders to stand firm. He had even struck at the assailants with his parasol. But now, in the reaction from that great excitement, he felt as one who looks upon a place of graves, himself the last survivor of the folk there buried. Where was his dear Jeyyâsh? Where were their pleasant conversations and their chess-games on the palace-roof?

He waddled slowly, leaning on his staff and stopping often, ostensibly to look at something, but, in fact, to rest. A servant at his heels observed his every movement and, when they traversed sunlit places, took great care to shade his head, already well protected by a mighty turban. Abdul Halîm was saddened to behold the town as usual, the hawkers and the beggars in accustomed corners, the shops all open in the shadowed ways; to hear the cheerful sounds of business and meet smiling faces.

He was near the mosque of Ibrahîm and had just paused for breath when he was overtaken by the Sheykh Salâmah, who cried :

"Hail, O sea of learning! Art going to the convocation? Let me walk with thee."

Though the encounter was by no means pleasing to the great historian, he could not well refuse a piece of courtesy. Salâmah told him:

"I have just come from the palace, where I spent this morning, trying to persuade Mukarram to respect the rules of war. I have his sanction to announce to everybody that nothing will be altered owing to the change of rulers."

"The flea upon the camel's back says: 'See me guide him!'" muttered Abdul Halîm within his soul. But he said nothing openly save "Praise to Allah."

At entering the mosque they parted, each finding his accustomed place among his peers. More than a hundred Sheykhs were there assembled in the solemn shade, set in a circle upon costly rugs. Prayers were performed in congregation, and then the head of the Hanafite college opened the proceedings.

In the battle of the day before, it seemed, large numbers of the students had thrown in their lot with the defenders—behaviour prejudicial to the university, and likely to bring punishment to quiet people, so the president affirmed. It was not as if the troops had been engaged in holy war; then all men's duty would have been to join and help them. This was the illicit strife of Muslim princes moved by lust of power. The convocation had been summoned to reprove the culprits.

One Huseyn ibn Al Kumm, born in Zabîd, and of an honoured house, was cited as the ringleader. He, with a crowd of students, was present in the background of the mosque. Accused of breach of discipline, he answered boldly that, in his opinion, the strife of yesterday was holy warfare, since Al Mukarram, having slaughtered Muslims wholesale at

his former coming, must be regarded as a foe to El Islâm. A murmur of applause on this contention showed that the youth expressed the private views of many even of the learned doctors. But certain of the Shaffites objected, saying :

"How could it be holy war when Saïd was the aggressor ? 'Allah loves not the aggressors.' "

"Is the lion the aggressor when, most cunningly provoked, he falls into the trap which has been laid for him ? King Saïd—the Lord have mercy on him !—was beguiled, inveigled—the victim of a plot," cried Abdul Halim with vehemence.

"He was cruel and ambitious. He deserved his fate."

"May it please you, O my masters, I and my comrades were not fighting for King Saïd at all," put in the young Huseyn. "The Lord have mercy on him ! He was dead already. We were fighting for Jeyyâsh, whom we esteem the greatest poet in the world to-day. I, for one, have all his works by heart. He is one of the two men I most revere for wisdom. The second is the Sheykh Salâmah, my most subtle teacher in the school of logic."

"O strange conjuncture ! " murmured the historian.

The comment, heard by those around him, caused a smile.

"Jeyyâsh is a chess-player and a licentious lover," was objected loudly by the puritanical contingent who held unlawful all things, not necessities of man's existence, which distract the mind from thought of the Divine Creator.

"Then are we all to blame—the Lord forgive us ! " scoffed the great historian. "For many of us here are chess-players, and all have known love's madness in our time."

"We say not 'No' ; but for affairs of State . . ."

The discussion seemed about to break up into

groups of argument, when the Sheykh Muhammad ibn Uleyya, at the instance of the president, demanded silence. So great was his renown for sanctity that all obeyed him. He began :

“ My brothers, we are not met here to air our private sentiments, but to confer as Ulema, the guardians of this university and of the interests of quiet people in this land. We cannot but lament, as individuals, that a dynasty which we have grown to love, good Muslim people and true friends of learning, has suffered such disaster in the last few days. Nevertheless, as champions of the peaceful folk, whose immunity from all the pains of war we have to guard, it behoves us publicly to reprehend those of our order who, through mistaken zeal or in excitement, aided the defenders yesterday. The students have not been the sole, nor yet the chief, offenders.” Here he turned a humorous face towards the historian. “ Unless I have been misinformed, the greatest luminary of the age, the very sun of learning, rode to the fray upon a charger and struck doughty blows.”—Abdul Halîm looked thunderstruck. He hung his head.—“ The excuse I find, in his case, is the well-attested fact that he had for weapon only an umbrella, whereas the students fought with deadly arms. O Huseyn ibn Al Kumm, for thy misconduct I propose that we condemn thee to retire to Aîn el Himmah—where, as I know, thy father has a country-house—and not to come into Zabîd for three whole months ; and that the same decree of banishment be made against a score of thy companions who were forward in the fray, that they may meditate in solitude upon their conduct and repent thereof.”

A murmur of relief rose from the crowd of students.

The Sheykh Salâmah interjected :

“ May it please you, O my brethren, the King Mukarram has this day proclaimed a general amnesty. Further than that, he has appointed Ali ibn Al Kumm,

the father of my pupil here condemned, to fill a high position in the Government."

"It makes no difference," said the Sheykh Muhammad after a moment's consultation with the president. "Our business is to keep decorum in the university; our condemnation of Huseyn and his companions would have been the same supposing that Jeyyâsh, with whom we all are sympathizers, had been granted victory. The Learned have no part in worldly strife. . . . But it is true, my friends, and worthy of some record, that Mukarram has observed the rules of war on this occasion. He called on the defenders to capitulate, with offer of fair terms, before assailing them; and during the assault his troops slew only combatants."

At that there rose a cry: "He did a fearful thing: he touched the palm!" An old man in the circle told with deepest horror how the highland troopers had cut down two palm trees in order to construct a battering-ram against the gate, in disobedience of the Prophet's plain command: "Destroy not their means of living, nor their fruit trees, and touch not the palm." To those who idolized the letter of the law, and they were the majority in that assembly, this crime of cutting down two palm trees seemed more heinous in Mukarram than his former wholesale massacre of harmless folk. The Hanafites, who seek the spirit, took a different view; Abdul Halîm remarking that "Touch not the palm" was but a detail of the general order by no means to destroy the people's livelihood. He boldly stated his opinion that the highlanders in this case had done little wrong, since they had cut down two trees only, just sufficient for their purpose, and since no other trees than palm trees, large enough to suit that purpose, were to be found for several miles around Zabîd.

At last the president exclaimed: "Enough! All

this is nothing to the purpose. Every one knows that Arab clansmen are not experts in religious law. Nor is it in our power or duty to reform them. Continue to advise us, O my soul ! ”

The Sheykh Muhammad then pursued : “ I say that Al Mukarram Ahmad has, on the whole, done well on this occasion.”

“ What of the prisoners—the ladies and the royal children ? ” questioned Abdul Halim with bitter emphasis.

“ They will be sent to Dahlak with all honour—such of them as are free. The slaves, of course, change masters,” said the Sheykh Salamah quickly. “ I have the king’s own word for it.”

“ Mukarram has, it seems, a champion in our midst,” murmured the historian with a disdainful movement of the shoulders.

“ It is usual,” resumed the Sheykh Muhammad, “ for the Ulema to compliment new rulers when they come to power. We can with reason compliment Mukarram Ahmad on a great improvement in his conduct ; and pray the Lord to guide him in the way of truth. I move that two professors from each college be appointed to compose a fair address.”

The motion was approved and, after some debate on points of detail, the assembly rose. Most of the members waited in the precincts of the mosque until the sunset prayer. Salamah came up to the Sheykh Muhammad, saying :

“ The moderation which thou thinkest admirable in Mukarram is not his at all. It is the Lady Sayyidah who orders everything—the greatest mind of any woman of this age. Mukarram is no more than her chief captain of the guard.”

“ Thou dost not love him then ? ” inquired the Sheykh Muhammad, wondering.

“ How can one love these servants of ambition ? ”

answered Salâmah, scornful, as he moved away a little hastily, seeing the great historian draw near.

"Now I myself have some affection for Mukarram," explained the Sheykh Muhammad to the new arrival. "I cannot banish from my memory a certain day-break when he prayed beside me at Tureybah, and I took him for an angel ; before indulgence of his passions had deformed him quite. He sent this morning for my grandson, whom he loves sincerely, and offered to adopt him as his son, as he has done before."

"What was that villain saying to thee, O my dear?" whispered Abdul Halîm, not heeding his companion's speech. "I see in him the cause of all Jeyyâsh's madness. Nay, smile not, O beloved! I have questioned witnesses—a poor man named Mannullah and the hag Umm Hîlah. And now, when I behold his wondrous favour with Mukarram, I do most horribly suspect him of contriving Saïd's death. Alas, had poor Jeyyâsh but kept his wits and heard me, had Saïd but heeded my instruction, we had saved the realm."

"Hush, O my dear. Such thoughts are not for utterance," the saint rebuked him ; "though Allah knows that we are all, like thee, distraught with grief for that unhappy race. Please God they will return. Allah is greatest." And he pressed his old friend's hand in sign of sympathy. The cooing of the pigeons in the court distressed their hearts.

As Abdul Halîm went homeward in blue twilight in which the lanterns, borne by wayfarers, glowed forth like jewels, he had to draw aside upon the passage of some Arab horsemen ordered to patrol the town. Learned though he was, and truly pious, he cursed them in his heart as they went by. Departed was the glory of Zabîd. It but remained for him to write the history of these last few days, and then the angel who extracts men's souls would find him willing.



## XLIV

DURING his sojourn in Zabîd the King Mukarram was perforce reminded of the first occasion of his going thither. The memories thus roused were hateful to him. In his musing on those days but one bright spot appeared to him, and that bright spot surrounded like a halo the kind and comic personality of Abu Dad. His longing for the man revived. In truth the soul of the choleric prince had never ceased to love him, even while the hand oppressed. Where was he now? Had he met death upon his mad adventure? To think of going to the Wadi Ahmad! One so old and corpulent! By now he ought to have returned, if he still lived.

On his return, by way of Sanaa, to Dhu Jiblah, he despatched a servant to the jester's house, to ask the woman, had she any tidings. The man returned to tell him that the house stood empty; the woman had been called to join her husband, who had returned from his great journey some time back, and had settled, it was rumoured, in Zabîd.

"Ho, ho! Is that the way of it? He shuns me, does he?" said Mukarram on these tidings, with a cunning laugh. "My pleasure is in hunting. I will track him down."

He sent immediate orders to his uncle, the regent of Zabîd, to make inquiries; but without result. His uncle wrote to say that no such man existed. Affairs were at this deadlock when the prince of Shaîr, who was in Mukarram's confidence, informed him that a person

of his clan had seen the jester and conversed with him. That person was at present in Dhu Jiblah, having come to make report of the receipts from Shaïr.

“Bring him to me at once!” exclaimed the king.

Mukarram waited, lounging upon cushions in a room whose walls were decorated with the skins of creatures he had slain in hunting, surrounded by his boon companions who maintained a merry din. His loose robe open at the neck displayed a dewlap. His whole appearance was now bloated and unwieldy. When the deputy from Shaïr was presented to him, he put many questions in a heckling tone, then shouted “Good!” in accents of malicious glee. “It is our man! By the Most High, it can be no one else. He went towards Zabîd, thou sayest, and with two companions? Doubtless his two companions were our enemies. He loved the Squinter, but he dreads the clash of arms. No doubt he is now dwelling in some quiet place. That must not be—a man so gifted that it makes me laugh only to look at him when he is most in earnest! To-morrow, O my friends, we ride with fifty lances down to Arka, where he hid before. By the tombs of my fathers, by my manhood, we will have him out.”

“He merits death,” remarked a courtier, “for his impudence.”

“Die he shall not if I can help it,” said Mukarram. “His business is to make me laugh, and he shall not evade it.”

Abu Dad had dwelt in his delightful village for two months, and was sitting on his threshold in the early morning, soothed by the hum of bees among his blossomed fruit trees, when people came to tell him that a cavalcade drew near. A minute later he beheld a cloud of dust and many horsemen, and, riding at their head, the King Mukarram. The burly monarch roared at him :

"Thou whoreson rogue! At last I find thee! Say, what dost thou here? Say, am I not the sovereign of this country? Do I not keep thee in existence only that I may behold thy mirth-provoking shape? Of what use else art thou in God's creation? Answer me that, O son of infamy! Come, mount at once and home with me, thou truant ape! Immediately, or I will flog the skin from off thy body."

Abu Dad fell prostrate on the ground and, notwithstanding all these threats, begged leave to stay.

"Behold," he urged in self-excuse, "this house and garden. How modest yet how peaceful in the hands of God! They are beneath thy notice, O commander of the world, yet dear to Abu Dad as his own eyes. I am no longer framed for mirth; my mind is weary; I grow old. I would lead a quiet life with my companion. I beseech thee, O thou lord of kindness, let us be!"

Mukarram answered:

"I behold this house and garden and this village, but nought see I here to be preferred to me."

"The village is so peaceful, and so prosperous. It seems to smile."

"That is soon altered," cried Mukarram in a rage. "Hi, Hasan! Hi, Muhammad—all you men!—cut down yonder orchard and pile it in the house to make a fire. Nay, further, drive the people from the village and destroy their houses. Leave not one stone upon another. It is written."

A bitter cry arose from Abu Dad. He prayed for mercy.

"Cease to enrage me, lest I kill the people," said the king.

That evening, from his camp on the hillside, Mukarram bade the jester look once more upon the village. Its site was strewn with ruins, bare of trees, with smoke still rising from a hundred places. Only the

mosque and minaret remained. That morning they had been embowered in leaves, they now stood naked.

"I seek refuge in God!" gasped Abu Dad, tears trickling down his cheeks.

The king received the exclamation as a compliment. He laughed:

"Dhu Jiblah is a more attractive place henceforth, I fancy!"

"The folk will say that it is all my doing!"

"Thy doing! A good joke, by Allah. Now thy wits return. I never thought of that. By the Almighty, they would stone thee if they could because thou hast destroyed their native place. Now, by my manhood, I have half a mind to call them back and watch thy martyrdom. As if thou couldst destroy a village!"

"Nay, may it please your Highness, I have slain my thousands!"

"Thou, O dog! What meanest?"

"Of little insects, by your high permission."

The answer put Mukarram in complete good humour. His prince of jesters was once more amenable. On the way back to Dhu Jiblah he talked with him intimately, asking forgiveness of the Lord of Heaven and Earth for his impatience in the matter of that harmless village, remembering with satisfaction that he had not burned the fields of corn, nor cut down any palm trees, since none grew there.

They spent two nights upon the road, and at the third hour of a summer's morning reached the town. As the cavalcade advanced towards the palace, Abu Dad observed some country people staring upward at a house-front. Following the direction of their gaze, he saw a dark and shrivelled object, which he knew, from having seen its like before, to be a human head.

"The head of thy beloved, Said the Squinter," said Mukarram wearily. "The Lord have mercy on

him. How I loathed the man! But now that he is dead, the world seems empty."

The jester was no sooner settled in his lodging than a servant of the palace came with airs of secrecy to bid him to an audience of the queen. He lingered but the time required to cleanse his person of the dust of travel, and then accompanied the messenger through halls and corridors till he was shown into a lofty chamber hung with tapestry. There sat the Lady Sayyidah upon a dais with pens and ink and parchment near her—for she was a famous scribe—and, on a carven stand before her, an illuminated book.

"And so the king has caught thee!" she exclaimed at sight of him. "Inform me of thy doings all these months. I gave thee leave to journey to the Wadi Ahmad, but now I hear that thou hast visited Zabîd and other places."

Abu Dad retailed his story from the day of his departure to the day when he at length beheld the girl Yasminah. When he touched upon Yasminah's love for Prince Jeyyâsh, the lady gave an angry exclamation and inquired:

"What is the charm for women which those men exhale. They are black, or nearly so, their father and his forebears were mere slaves. And yet a high-born daughter of the Arabs can run mad for them."

Abu Dad put off the question with a shrug, merely remarking that they were not common men.

The queen proceeded with a heavy frown:

"I know another daughter of the Arabs whom they have bewitched—I speak of Umm Muarik, widow of the once-famed Squinter, on whom God have mercy—O Lady Asma, would thou wert alive to see the head of Saïd beneath her window!—She thinks always of that black man, though deceased. Never have I known a creature so infatuated. I truly think it gives her pleasure, not disgust, to know his severed

head is always close to her. I asked if there was any one whom she would like to see—since she detests her father and her mother—and she spoke of longing for her little daughter left behind there in Zabîd. Her desire was natural. I dispatched a rider to Zabîd, only to learn that the child, with other captives of that family, had been sent to Dahlak, where they have relations. I asked her, was there no one else she wished to see. ‘Not in this world,’ she said, ‘except Jeyyâsh, his brother.’ Now, I am much concerned about this girl who, though a captive, must be counted as our guest, the more so that her father is allied to us. I fear lest she go mad through brooding on her grief. But we are nothing to her; she abhors her people; all her affections have been conquered by these Abyssinian sorcerers. Thou art a servant of that house, and thou hast seen her friend Jeyyâsh. Go to her, I implore thee; raise her spirits.”

“To hear is to obey,” said Abu Dad.

Sayyidah clapped her hands. A servant, coming, received command to go to Umm Muarik’s lodging and inform her that a friend of Prince Jeyyâsh craved leave to wait on her. Abu Dad then retired into the ante-room, where presently the slave, returning, came and said:

“The lady is quite ready. Deign to follow me.”

Sâlihah was closely veiled. She rose to meet him with the spring of youth, exclaiming:

“Welcome, friend of my dear lord and brother.”

Her accents sent a shiver through his bones, as though an angel from on high had spoken to him. She made him sit on the divan beside her, and questioned him about Jeyyâsh. He told his story.

“And so the girl Yasmînah really loves him? I am glad!” she cried. “O happy thou, who hast beheld him lately. It may be I shall never see him

more, and I would fain have talked with him. He, like my hero gone to Allah's mercy, is one to whom a woman can reveal her mind without reserve. May Allah bless them both ! ”

“ I have loved them from their childhood,” moaned the jester.

At those words she dropped her veil and smiled upon him. He thought that he had never seen so sweet a face, nor one so sad without disfigurement. She made him talk about her husband's childhood.

“ So thou art Abu Dad ! ” she cried, enchanted. “ I have heard him speak of thee a hundred times with tender raillery ! ”

The jester at last ventured upon good advice, remembering the charge laid on him by the Lady Sayyidah. It behoved the youthful widow to look forward. The best of life was yet to come, if God so willed it. Men must die. He quoted the sublime Corân : “ The fate of each is tied about his neck, nor may one, laden, bear another's load.” Saïd, whom they loved, had gone to Allah's mercy. Their grief would not avail to call him back. In God's good time they also would return to Him. Meanwhile this world with all its blessings was their portion, to despise which would be nothing less than gross impiety.

She stopped him midway in his sermon, saying : “ It is not with me as the people here suppose. Sayyidah told thee to speak thus to me. I knew it ! . . . Because I do not weep and tear my flesh, nor rage in pride at my captivity, she thinks me mad. She cannot understand how any creature in misfortune can preserve serenity. That means that she has never known the sweetness of surrender, the peace which springs from self-devotion to the will of God. I know that they will force me to remarry though my love is dead. Misfortunes and indignities, no doubt, await me. They cannot take the light away from me. ‘ Praise be to

Him who holds dominion over all things. Unto Him we shall return.' "

The jester dropped a tear upon her hand as he withdrew, and she it was who strove to cheer him, saying :

"Thou hast made me glad. Come again soon, I pray thee, and tell me more about those early days."



## XLV

JEYYÂSH and the Wazîr Khalf journeyed to the port of Aden without further misadventures, for they went disguised. Indeed, to have been robbed or taken prisoner just then would have been a satisfaction to Jeyyâsh, whose state of mind was that in which men court destruction for release from misery ; and Khalf was not much happier. The game was lost, on which the proud descendant of the Òmeyyads had staked his all. His only consolation was his real affection for Jeyyâsh, who still had means sufficient to support them both in exile. As the prince regained his spirits, the remembrance of his love returned to him, increasing his reluctance to shake off the dust of Yaman. He appeased his soul with projects of a journey to the Wadi Ahmad, to take a last farewell of the beloved and announce his downfall to the Sultan of the Banî Sôr. While they were waiting for a ship at Aden, he even made inquiries as to the distance, and the estimable cost of travel, to that chieftain's territory ; but no one knew its whereabouts exactly.

“ It is somewhere in the wilds of Oman or of Hadramaut,” was all he could extract from men who, by their own avowal, had not been there. “ A journey of a month or two months. Allah knows ! ”

To have travelled with no better guide than these conjectures would have been insane. Jeyyâsh renounced the project, though it shone to him ; and

with renunciation he resumed his former habits. Once more the chessboard was his chief amusement.

They stayed in Aden several days, until a ship with India for her destination touched the port. In that frail vessel they were borne for weeks over a sea as blue by day as lapis lazuli; past famous cities, Oman and Bahreyn the pearly, up to the Shatt el Arab and the port of Basrah. By then they had grown used to ceaseless rocking; the stillness of the mighty river spoilt their rest at night. Despite themselves, they were excited, interested, by this panorama of strange countries, and the sight of foreign peoples. "Praise be to Allah, who made all things different!" "Praise to the One of infinite variety!" they both exclaimed continually. The servant of Jeyyâsh alone was quite unmoved. A strong, phlegmatic Abyssinian, who regarded no man but his master, he performed his duties now with just the same demeanour which he had worn about the palace at Zabîd.

At Basrah they sold, one by one, the presents which had once been destined for the Sultan of the Bani Sôr, and with a portion of the proceeds purchased merchandise of easy sale, Jeyyâsh admitting Khalf to equal partnership in all his ventures. Then the ship weighed anchor once again, the town of Basrah and its handsome mosques shrank quickly down into its wood of palm trees, as she raced beneath her swelling sail, ploughing the surface of the broad, full river, back to sea.

After calling at the cities of the coast of Persia, she sped for long beside a desert land till the low Sindian shores appeared, where there was water and many towns and villages beside the waves. At length they reached a noble city of the land of Hind, set amid gardens of extreme luxuriance. There they landed and, with some preliminary trouble, hired a lodging where they dwelt in modest comfort, going

regularly to the mosque, and trading with the Muslim merchants, distressed at sight of all the heathen in the streets.

In this sedentary life, without the consolation they had found in travel, the sense of loss was ever present with them. Jeyyâsh sought refuge in the game of chess, which he rehearsed alone—for Khalf played badly—or in his lute to which he improvised sad, dirge-like songs. But there were brighter moments, when they talked together cheerfully, planning a useful and renowned career as merchants; when they spoke also of their past experiences and revealed their inmost thoughts to one another.

Since they were so great a journey distant from Zabîd, with little hope of ever setting eyes upon its domes again, Khalf spoke his mind about the people there, and confided to the prince his shrewd suspicion that the girl Yasminah had been but the bait in a trap set for him by the Sheykh Salâmah. Jeyyâsh opposed the notion at first hotly, being by nature loath to figure as a dupe. They argued in and out, but Khalf held fast to his contention, and in the end the prince admitted that it might be so.

"But then he is the wickedest of men—a monster to be slain at sight!" Jeyyâsh averred. "I knew that he fomented quarrels and disorders in which he had a care to take no part. I knew that he gave bad advice to my lamented brother. I bore him no good will. But this exceeds the worst of which I deemed him capable. To take such vile advantage of a weakness which, the whole world knows, is common to all men of generous breed! The Lord repay him!"

Occasionally, when they chanced to be in cheerful mood, they would indulge in dreams concerning what would happen supposing that Jeyyâsh regained the kingdom.

"Thou hast made me partner in thy merchandise!

Say, wilt thou share the kingdom with me in like manner? Are we not as brothers?" asked the Omeyyad with playful smile.

"It shall be as thou sayest," said Jeyyâsh in the same manner. The kingdom seemed remote from both of them.

They had lived for six months in the Indian city, and had grown content; Jeyyâsh had bought a pretty slave-girl of the country, in whose charms he found some moments of complete forgetfulness; Khalf too was settling down to the condition of a merchant; when, one evening, as they walked between the waving, dark-green gardens and the shore, they came upon a fortune-teller seated in the shade of palms. He had made a sand-table at which he sat, awaiting custom, inviting passers-by to make a trial of his art.

The man was, by his dress, a Muslim from the island of Serendib. Khalf proposed, half jesting, that they should confer with him, and seek to know what fate might hold in store. Jeyyâsh was sceptical. Seeing their hesitation, the fortune-teller called:

"O monarch of the age, fear nothing, for I practise lawful arts, approved of God."

The pair, astonished, stared at one another. Then Khalf laughed.

"Which is the monarch of us twain?" he asked maliciously.

"Nay, who am I to make distinction?" the creature answered, spreading wide his hands, and showing his white teeth in an alluring grin. "Nay, both appear to me of regal dignity, the one by right of station and the people's love, the other by descent."

"Thou speakest truth, by Allah!" Khalf seemed greatly pleased. He drew Jeyyâsh near to the fortune-teller, who thenceforth addressed the prince exclusively, drawing mysterious lines on the sand-table.

"Wealth and the kingdom in a little while."

"How long?" asked Khalf, with bated breath.

The fortune-teller gave no answer till Jeyyâsh in turn inquired: "How long a while?"

"I cannot tell your Honour with precision. Less than a year, I fancy, by the signs. Thou wilt travel on a ship upon the sea and then upon a beast on land for many days; and at the end of all that journey thou wilt find the kingdom."

"And I—what shall I find?" asked Khalf excitedly.

The fortune-teller threw a glance at him and then resumed his drawing in the sand.

"Cleave to this man and thou shalt have great wealth and honour."

"And love?" asked Khalf facetiously.

The fortune-teller frowned, and when he answered, it was to Jeyyâsh, not Khalf, that he addressed his words:

"She whom thy heart desired above all earthly things, but has forgotten now, will be bestowed on thee. Moreover, thou shalt have a son, who will reign after thee, but not by her."

"In sh'Allah!" cried the friends.

Both gave him money, then pursued their walk beside the shore with minds completely changed. Those strange predictions of the fortune-teller had banished their new-found contentment with the life of merchants. Their conversation now was of Zabîd, and how to get there without loss of time.

"I shall revive the honour of the Omeyyads! I shall be king!" Khalf murmured rapturously. Jeyyâsh could scarce believe his ears. He stared at the offender, but, seeing him unconscious of offence, refrained from comment. The man was building on his own remark that they should share the kingdom, a palace in the air which would be shattered, if God willed it, though now was not the moment to destroy it; nor would the prince at any time have done so

harshly, for he valued Khalf, and but for that intense conceit, which bred presumption, loved him. So they continued amicably to project the journey to Arabia.

Upon no more assurance than the sayings of that conjurer—who might, for all they knew, have been a rogue—they took their passage on a ship and sailed to Aden, where, so sure was Khalf that they would soon regain the kingdom, that he urged the prince to send their only servant on an errand to the Sultan of the Bani Sôr, to warn him of the coming change and claim alliance. The servant, being of prosaic nature, thought them mad, but none the less set out upon the errand with devoted zeal. It was his master's order.

It was then arranged between them that Jeyyâsh, in Indian clothes and with his Indian slave-girl, who was five months gone with child, should travel to Dhu Jiblah and spy out the state of government; while Khalf, proceeding to Zabîd, should spread a false report that he had died in Hind, and afterwards collect adherents in the country. They parted in the market of Ta'izz, having journeyed thither with the merchants' caravan; with which Khalf then continued on his way, while the prince with his companion went to Al Mukarram's capital. There he remained the time sufficient to assure himself that there was strife among the highland chiefs, ere he set out with other traders for Tehâmah.

At the third hour of a burning day, the last surviving son of King Najâh entered Zabîd upon a donkey's back, leading by a rope a camel on whose hump, in curtained howdaj, rode his Indian girl. He had shaved the hair off his face, letting his lovelocks grow in Indian fashion, and had covered one of his eyes with a black patch. He passed unnoticed in the throng of travellers.

Dismounting at the well-known hostelry by the

Tehâmah gate, he asked what houses were to let, and also shops ; for he had brought with him some bales of Indian ware as part of his disguise. Before the sun set, he had found what suited him. His dwelling was a clean and airy upper chamber, whence he could survey at large the city of his dreams ; his shop an alcove in the well-frequented street which led from the chief markets to the royal palace. It had a view of the main entrance to the palace, at present uninhabited, they told him, save by the secretary of the governor who had his quarters there.

At night he called upon a certain notable renowned for probity, and begged leave to deposit with his Honour certain moneys he had brought from Hind.

"I am acquainted with but one man of this country," he explained, "the Sherîf Khalf the Omeiyad, who bade me come to thee."

"The Sherîf is honourably known to me," was the reply. "Indeed, he is at present in the house. Wait here a moment. He shall come to thee."

The master of the house withdrew, and Khalf appeared. The friends embraced, and the vizier made his report, which was entirely favourable. He had discovered hundreds of their partisans in hiding, and had learnt besides that many had escaped to Dahlak. They needed but a fighting head to make rebellion. It was arranged that Khalf should meet the prince twice every week in secret and by night.

As Jeyyâsh, alone at last, sat out before the doorway of his upper chamber, watching the vision of Zabîd in moonlight, he gave praise to Allah. The fortune-teller from Serendib had not lied. And yet his heart was loath to raise the standard of revolt. The city seemed so peaceful and so prosperous.

## XLVI

" PRAISE be to Allah, we have peace at present. We have seen enough of war. I can recall the fighting round our village when Najâh with half the armies of Zabîd strove with Nafis who led the other half. I was a young man then and newly married. It went on for days. They struggled in our gardens and even, sometimes, in among the houses. Our fields were strewn with corpses ; and for days we dare not come into the city here to sell our produce. . . . Then three times have I seen a highland army marching to assail Zabîd. Those were bad times ! "

The speaker was an aged countryman who twice a week came into town to sell an ass's load of vegetables. He stood with one hand on his hip, the other grasping the loose bridle of the ass, which stood behind him with dejected head. Many awnings of palm-fibre, hung at different levels, made variety of shade upon the crowd which filled the long bazaar. The old man often stopped to gossip at Jeyyâsh's shop, having conceived a liking for the Hindi, as they called him.

" Did they not spoil your crops ? " inquired Jeyyâsh, set cross-legged on the platform which did duty both for floor and counter.

" Not willingly, perhaps ; but men must live, and soldier-men, it seems to me, are always hungry. Moreover there are vicious goats in every herd. When there is war we fear to go upon the roads, and so the produce of our land is spoilt for market. What



pleasure can those proud ones find in still contending now the Light has come? It is against the will of God, the sacred law. Say, O my master, are there wars in Hind?"

"Wallahi!" shrugged the prince.

The old fellâh exclaimed: "The world is so!" and went his way, leaving Jeyyâsh with matter for reflection. Never in his life till now had he conversed upon quite equal terms with common folk, and he had found unlooked-for wisdom in such conversation. The one desire of all these people was for peace. What right had he, or any other of God's creatures, to vex a quiet land for his ambition. True, Khalf informed him that he now could raise a host of men prepared to give their lives for him. But they were former soldiers of his brother, slaves of power; and Khalf himself was pitiless in the pursuit of worldly honours. The prince, for his part, had become enamoured of a private life, and often wished he had been born a simple trader.

To two men only in Zabîd had he intended to disclose his real identity; and one of these, the Sheykh Rashîd, his former tutor, had died the week before his coming, as he learnt upon inquiry. The other was the great historian, who—poor, good man!—wept tears of joy at recognizing his beloved prince. To this good friend Jeyyâsh confided his new aversion for the strife of kings; whereat the aged Sheykh embraced him fondly, crying:

"Praise be to Allah for thy frame of mind! Thou sayest thou hast no ambition and no jealousy. Then all the more must we desire to see thee in the seat of power. For look, my son, around thee on the world, and tell me, have we not enough of arrogance and foolish pride? I see this plain intention in our Muslim laws that only men of humble heart should bear dominion. Already thou wast crowned in all

men's thoughts. Praise be to Allah Who has made thee worthy of our choice."

" 'All men': only hear this dreamer!" laughed Jeyyâsh. "I assure thee that the people desire nought save peace. I commune with them daily, and I know."

In fact the quiet Indian, seated in his shop or strolling in the palm-groves at the cool of day, had opportunities for hearing true opinions.

"Hast ever spoken to them of thyself?" inquired the great historian.

"I have spoken of my father and of Saïd, and heard their comments."

"Speak of thyself, and thou wilt hear a different tale. Once raise thy standard, and it is Jehâd. All true believers in the land will fight for thee."

"But why," the prince inquired, "since their desire is peace?"

"Because Mukarram Ahmad is regarded as an infidel. His yoke is felt as a disgrace upon the land and those who dwell in it!"

"But why?" he asked again. "He did not massacre the quiet people on this last occasion. He showed mercy. I myself have cause to thank him for letting Malak and my little ones escape to Dahlak."

"Hast thou not heard?" cried the historian in tones of awe. "He did a far worse thing even than massacre, since wild excesses in the heat of conquest may find some excuse. He utterly destroyed a certain village of the foothills, the abode of quiet people, for a private whim. The fruit trees were cut down and burned, the houses levelled; the wretched population wandered, begging, through Tehâmah. For this Mukarram is anathema to faithful men. He stands condemned by the tribunal of the Learned. Thy return will be the signal for a holy war."

"But how to give the signal? I have sought in vain some man of leading, whose adherence would proclaim my cause." The prince said this as if he had no helpers, having promised Khalf to breathe no word of all their preparations to a living soul.

The old man thought a moment. Then he said :

"I know of no man who could better serve thy purpose, if he chose, than Ali ibn Al-Kumm, State Secretary to the governor, the same who has his lodging in the royal palace. He was a staunch supporter of thy brother's cause. I used to love him as a good companion and a chess-player. But since by God's decree the power has passed to Al Mukarram, the man has changed. I know not what to make of him. He accepts the highest post they have to offer, and yet they say he hates them, and especially the governor, who is, as all men know, the best of them. I advise thee to be very cautious in approaching him, for no man knows his mind. Such men are perilous. Moreover he is friendly with the Sheykh Salâmah; his son, Huseyn, the poet, being spellbound to that hypocrite exactly as King Saïd, thy brother, was of old."

"And what of Sheykh Salâmah?" asked the prince. "By Allah, I have come to think that he deserves to die. I ask thee for a judgment, O my friend. Did he, or did he not, entice me with the girl Yasminah?"

"He did, in my opinion," Abdul Halîm made answer gravely. "Moreover I have witnesses to his complicity in that affair—the sorcerer Mannullah and the hag Umm Hilah—whom thou canst question if thou hast a doubt. Nor only that: I think that he betrayed thy noble brother, if to know of an inhuman plot and yet to keep the knowledge hidden from the victim can be called betrayal."

“ Then by the life of God’s creation, I will kill him ; for I know that he advised my brother to rely upon the prince of Shaïr.”

“ And in so doing thou wouldst serve the Right. Yet never doubt but that his subtle soul suspects thy mind of such a purpose, if thou livest, and that he would rather see the devil than Jeyyâsh triumphant. It was for that I warned thee to be cautious in approaching the State Secretary, since Salâmah is familiar in that house. The son Huseyn admires thee greatly, having all the verses thou hast ever made by heart. He once announced, before a full assembly of the Learned, that, of all men, he revered most thee and Sheykh Salâmah—as who should say, I long for Heaven and Hell. It made me laugh. For the rest, the young man is a perfect coxcomb, and pugnacious, ready to whip his sword out for an eyelid raised.”

“ I know the breed,” chuckled the prince, foreseeing pastime. He thanked his old friend kindly and withdrew.

Beside the palace gate, against the wall, there was a long and roomy bench of stone, where soldiers used to lounge in former times. The Indian went and sat there on the following day, after the middle of the afternoon, when the said bench came into shadow. Cross-legged, with back against the wall, he seemed intent upon the chessboard set before him on the stone. He played alone till suddenly a man sprang up beside him and squatted down, exclaiming : “ Play a match, O Hindi ! ”

“ With pleasure and alacrity,” replied Jeyyâsh.

His adversary was a servant of the Secretary, and he beat him easily. The man looked crest-fallen, protesting, “ I am called a player ” ; but suddenly he brightened, adding : “ I will fetch Al Janadi, who will defeat thee in a trice, I swear it.” Another servant of the house was brought. The Indian won again

without the slightest difficulty. By then a crowd had gathered to observe the play.

"By Allah," cried the vanquished, "thou art a professor, worthy to play with our good master Ali and his son Huseyn. They say that Ali ibn Al-Kumm was never beaten save by one man only, Jeyyâsh the son of Najâh, now gone to Allah's mercy. Come again to-morrow at the same hour, O Hindi, and we will find a champion to defeat thee."

Jeyyâsh replied: "To hear is to obey," with humble reverence. He gathered up his chessmen in a linen bag, tucked the board beneath his arm, and so departed in the sunset glow.

He returned to the stone bench upon the following day, when a new rival challenged him, and people gathered round to watch the game; which had but just begun when Huseyn ibn Al-Kumm burst through the circle of spectators, and stood looking down with scorn upon the players. Then, with a swish of his long sleeve, he upset all the pieces, and said coolly: "That is finished. Play with me, O Hindi." Therewith he sat up on the platform and reset the board. The crowd increased, for the young noble was esteemed a champion. The contest lasted for an hour, with scarce a word between the players, and then Jeyyâsh exclaimed with triumph: "Esh-Sheykh mât" (The Sheykh is dead). The young man stared incredulous a moment, then sprang erect with teeth and hands tight clenched and blazing eyes. It seemed that he was going to assail the victor, but he changed his purpose, and was striding off in dudgeon when he saw his father, the Grand Secretary, coming from the Wâli's house. He cried to him: "Come hither, O my father. I have been beaten at the game of chess."

"A wonder!" said his father, drawing near, "for thou art now well-nigh my equal at the game, and there

was only one in all the world to beat me—Jeyyâsh the son of Najâh, who died in India.” He seemed to dwell upon the name with sad affection. “Say, who beat thee?”

“This Hindi,” said the young man, pointing to Jeyyâsh, who still sat cross-legged on the bench, apparently unconscious of their eyes upon him. The Secretary noted the appearance of the man—a perfect Indian—the form of turban, the smooth chin, the lovelocks, the patch upon one eye—and, deeming him a stranger, said: “He must be a good player.”

“That he is.”

“Come, play with him again, that I may note his method.”

Huseyn once more approached the Indian, who was nothing loath. They played again. Jeyyâsh was victor in ten moves. The Secretary, much excited, pushed his son aside, regardless of the young man’s grief, and took his place beside the board. Jeyyâsh played with him for two hours, in presence of a mighty crowd, and then, for his contentment, let him win.

“Praise be to Allah!” cried the Secretary, hugely pleased. “Thou art indeed a prince of players. I had all that I could do to corner thee, and I am reckoned the best player in Zabîd. Moreover, thou didst throw away a great advantage—a thing no man should do in play with one who is his match in skill. We must contend again. My son, too, will not rest till he has overcome thee. Come to our house to-morrow at the hour that suits thee. I will tell the servants thou art free to come and go like one of us. By Allah, thou hast made me for a while forget my worries.”

He frowned once more in angry thought as he departed, and the prince could hear him mutter through clenched teeth: “If I could meet but a dog of the house of Najâh, I would make him monarch of Zabîd to spite this governor.”

Jeyyâsh, as he went home that evening to his Indian slave-girl, felt that he had made a great step towards success. Still it behoved him to be very cautious, for the Secretary and his son were headstrong and uncertain, and had for friend the traitor Sheykh Salâmah.

## XLVII

JEYVÂSH decided to avoid the palace for a day or two, fearing lest too great eagerness to profit by the Secretary's invitation should be thought to savour of presumption in so small a man. But as he sat up in his shop upon the following morning, Huseyn ibn Al-Kumm strolled up and said :

" O Hindi, come and play a game with me ! "

" A man who plays with lions runs great risk, my lord ! "

The young man laughed in the brief scornful way habitual to him, before replying :

" Have no fear. I am thy ransom. "

" With pleasure and alacrity, " rejoined the prince. He waited but to close the shutters of his shop, then joined the noble youth, who had walked on impatiently.

Once more he entered the great house in which he had been born and educated. How different was its appearance now from that which it had worn in those old days, or but a year ago while Saïd still reigned. The corridors and halls, once thronged and clamorous, were now deserted, resonant to every footbeat.

His guide produced a key out of the bosom of his robe and with it opened a small door. They passed into a vaulted chamber which got light through a small window high up in the wall.

" This is my private place, O Hindi, " said the young lord amiably. " Here we can play without the fear of interruption. "



He produced a board and chessmen. They crossed their legs upon the floor and played. Huseyn was better-tempered at the game in private, with no chance lookers-on to vex his pride. Having allowed him to win once after a good contest, Jeyyâsh, in the next bout, put forth his skill, and beat him with such ease that the young man cried out in awe : " I seek refuge in Allah ! Say, how was that done ? "

" It is a simple stratagem, which, with permission, I will teach your Honour."

And he explained the moves at length, for the young man's instruction. Huseyn forgot the difference of their respective rank, and spoke as to an equal, freely, eloquently, revealing all his likes and dislikes, and reciting his own poetry. Jeyyâsh had much ado to keep an unmoved face when he heard himself extolled and quoted as the greatest poet, and his enemy Salâmah as the greatest jurist, in the world ; still more ado to hide his Arab knowledge and preserve the accent of a foreigner in conversation on such subjects.

A servant, whom the young man bullied pitilessly, brought refreshments at midday, and returned about the middle of the afternoon to say that the State Secretary had returned and wished to play chess with the Hindi. Huseyn swore roundly at the information. He took a whip and beat that slave about the head and shoulders, but none the less he led the Hindi to his father's presence.

There were several persons of distinction on the dais in the great audience-chamber conversing with Ali ibn Al-Kumm, who, on catching sight of the meek Indian, shouted : " Come up hither ! Play a bout with me."

Jeyyâsh was terrified, for he descried the Sheykh Salâmah in the seat of honour on the dais. Still he could not refuse. With gaze downcast, hands hidden in his hanging sleeves, he joined the great ones. He

was made to sit between Salâmah and the Secretary. Feeling the traitor's eyes fixed hard upon him he could scarcely breathe. The horror—near to suffocation—that he felt in presence of a man so devilish, together with the terror of detection, almost killed him. He thought that his distress must be apparent to the men around him. He wished that the black patch upon his eye had been a mask to cover all his face. And, over all, there rose a wave of wrath and indignation, a furious desire to strangle Saïd's betrayer, come what might of it. But when, after a minute, the Sheykh Salâmah turned his head away, and spoke indifferently to a neighbour, the tumult of the prince's blood abated. He beheld the chessboard set for battle, and heard the Secretary say impatiently: "Begin, O best of players! What delays thee?" The ordeal was past, and though he often found himself thereafter in the presence of Salâmah, he never again experienced that awful paroxysm of alarm and rage.

Of the attitude of the State Secretary he could form no sure opinion; for although he sometimes heard him rail against the governor and cry: "O Allah, hasten the return of the people of Najâh!" at other times he seemed content with the existing order, and boasted of his favour with the Lady Sayyidah. One day the prince was very near discovery. Huseyn, who flew into a rage on slight occasion, was beating his slave with a whip, when the lash, flying round, stung the pretended Indian on the cheek. Forgetful of disguise he sprang up and had almost said: "I am Jeyyâsh!"—which was his war-cry—when remembrance choked him. The Secretary, who was present, struck by his behaviour, asked: "What is thy name? Thou wast about to tell us."

He said: "My name is Bahr, by your Honour's leave."

The Secretary made a jest upon the name, and

passed to other talk. But he kept looking at the Indian in a curious manner, and Jeyyâsh was much afraid that he had formed suspicions. It made him doubly cautious for the future.

At night he sometimes met with Khalf, who now moved freely in the city, having proclaimed Jeyyâsh's death and his own loyalty to the Suleyhi; and was informed how things were going in the provinces. At Khalf's suggestion he wrote letters to the leaders of the Abyssinian troops dispersed throughout the land, and got their answers breathing fierce devotion. It only remained to bring his friends together in the city and its neighbourhood, and then to choose a moment for the rising. This he was loath to do, through doubts of his own judgment. He prayed to Allah to decide for him, to show him the right moment by a sign. And on a certain night, which he esteemed the brightest of his life, this prayer was answered.

With all his various business, he had not forgotten the claims upon his kindness of the Indian slave-girl, who now drew near the time of her delivery. Her comfort was among his chief concerns. After singing her to sleep that night, he had himself lain down to rest, but could not sleep for thinking of her and himself, and of the troublous time which lay before them, and of what might be the fate in store for her yet unborn child, if male or female. Then suddenly he must have dropped to sleep, although he fancied he was still awake; for a black man in white raiment stood beside him, saying: "The kingdom will return to thee in the same hour when this thy maid shall be delivered of her son, who shall bear rule in Yaman, he and his descendants, for a length of time." The black man turned with deference to one, a shadow-shape, who stood beside him, and inquired: "Is it not so, O Leader of the Faithful?" The shadow-shape replied with voice like music: "It is so."

And then Jeyyâsh awoke. He had no doubt but that the black man was the favoured of God, Huseyn ibn Salâmah, vizier and freedman of the city's founder ; for that great saint had more than once appeared to members of his family ; but of the shadow-shape he dared not think.

By this mysterious means the time was fixed. He told Khalf that the rising must take place upon the day the Indian slave-girl was delivered of her first-born. She was near her time.

"So be it," answered the vizier, with reverence for the celestial vision ; "if only our opponents do not force our hand. We have now five thousand helpers hidden in the city and its neighbourhood. Some overt act may lead to a discovery, and then we needs must fight."

"Fear nothing !" said Jeyyâsh. "Go to him thou knowest, demand half my money, and distribute it among our soldiery."

Two days later, as the quiet Indian was playing chess with Huseyn ibn Al-Kumm in the presence of the latter's father, it happened that the Secretary, to incite his son, exclaimed :

"If thou beat the Hindi in this game, I will let thee carry this year's revenue to Al Mukarram and the Lady Sayyidah ; and thou shalt have the pay attaching to that post of messenger, which amounts to several thousands of dînârs."

The young man cried that he would win if God so willed it, and, seeing that so much depended on his victory, to please them both, Jeyyâsh enabled him to do so. But he had not bargained for the victor's joy. It was uproarious. He leapt about the room, exultant, beat Jeyyâsh upon the head and shoulders, and insulted him until the old man rose in anger to rebuke him. Not content with that, he thrust his hand into the Indian's face and tore the black patch from his

eye. The prince sprang up, beside himself with rage. Before he knew it, he had cried : " I am Jeyyâsh ! " and saw a look of stupefaction on the father's face, of horror on the son's. The Secretary came down, barefoot, from the dais, trailing his cloak behind him. Jeyyâsh had now a dagger in his hand. Seeing its gleam, the old man went to a cupboard in the room and brought from thence a copy of the sacred book, on which he swore a solemn oath to the effect that he was altogether loyal to the children of Najâh. On hearing that, Jeyyâsh put up his dagger.

The Secretary told his son to guard the door and then, having replaced the book, approached Jeyyâsh, staring as at a supernatural being.

" Allahu Akbar ! " he exclaimed, and then again, after a pause, " Allahu Akbar ! . . . And thou hast sat here in thy father's house, unknown, unhonoured, hast suffered that my son should lay his hand on thee ! Say, where is thy abode ? Hast women with thee ? "

" I dwell upon the roofs by the Tehâmah market. My sole companion is an Indian slave-girl great with child."

" Go, O Huseyn, give orders for the State apartments to be furnished instantly, for we have guests of honour. Breathe not the truth, or we are all dead men ! Thou, O my lord, deign to replace the patch upon thine eye, and leave us for awhile. Go to the mosque of Ibrahîm and pray for all of us. Return about the second hour of darkness. I need time for thought."

" I beg of thee one favour only : preserve my secret from the Sheykh Salâmah."

" To hear is to obey for both my son and me. Deign to depart."

Jeyyâsh obeyed, his mind a turmoil of relief and doubt. Had he succeeded ? Had he failed ? Were those two Kummites true or treacherous ? He could not tell.

When he came back in darkness to the royal palace Ali ibn Al-Kumm received him with an anxious face, though he exclaimed, "Good tidings!" and led him to the king's apartments, where a great surprise awaited him. The rooms, now richly carpeted, were full of lights and busy servants; the Indian girl had been brought thither in the afternoon, and there, an hour before his coming, she had given birth to a fine boy. The same is Fâtik, who was afterwards the king.

"Praise be to Allah!" cried Jeyyâsh with fervour, forgetting everything in his concern for her and for the child. It was Ali ibn Al-Kumm who recalled him to the world of strife, requesting leave to speak apart with him a minute.

"I have arranged these rooms for thee for very shame that one of that resplendent house to which I owe so much should lodge in meaner quarters in this city," said the old man anxiously; "and when the thing can be no longer hid I shall proclaim thee king, and trust in Allah and the people to defend thy right. I and my household are prepared to die for thee. But much I fear the trained troops of the garrison will crush our hopes before they come to fruit. Say, hast thou any following at all, O sun that warms us?"

"I have five thousand men in and around the city at this minute. A word to Khalf the Omeyyad and they are here!"

The old man's joy was terrible to witness. It showed how great had been his secret fears. He clasped his hands and raised them up to Heaven, murmuring praise to Allah with convulsive gasps; and then he burst out weeping like a child.

"The Lord be thanked!" he blubbered. "We shall win, in sh'Allah. They have no force to match five thousand men—trained men of Saïd's host. No need to wait. Deign to send word to Khalf this very

moment, and we shall hold the city when to-morrow dawns."

Huseyn ibn Al-Kumm flung himself down at the king's feet, and asked forgiveness for his former rudeness when he knew him not. Jeyyâsh embraced him.

Then Khalf came, hotfoot. Having talked with him, Jeyyâsh went out with two score volunteers and took the northern gate by a surprise attack, thus opening communication with his partisans without the walls, who in an hour came hurrying to swell the force within.

"My command is that of the Prophet when he entered Mecca: Let there be no bloodshed!" said Jeyyâsh to Khalf and other leaders ere the work began. The order was at once communicated to the soldiers, who all received it with immense enthusiasm.

"No bloodshed! A white victory! Jeyyâsh! Jeyyâsh!" they shouted in a cadence as they marched along; and, at the cry "Jeyyâsh," the quiet folk poured out of all the houses till the streets were full—men, women, children, howling praise to Allah and blessings on Jeyyâsh, the righteous king.

The Suleyhi governor, the uncle of Mukarram, was surrounded in his house. The garrison laid down their arms on promise of fair terms, being surrounded also and outnumbered greatly. Jeyyâsh, having superintended the disarmament, went personally to receive the governor's surrender.

"Nothing can defend us against you, O house of Najâh," said Asaad ibn Shihâb with a sad smile; "for men's fortunes are like buckets from a well, which rise with water now for one and now for other. But such as I demand not mercy."

"And such as thou shalt not be injured," answered Jeyyâsh warmly. "Depart in safety with thy people and thy property, for I have heard it was by thy

contriving that Mukarram spared my wife and children when he took Zabîd."

In the main thoroughfares and in the palace square the midnight was as bright as day with lamps along the walls, with torches waved, and swinging lanterns in the hands of footfarers. The domes of all the mosques and the muezzin's galleries were ringed with lights. Religious men at the street corners rehearsed the mystic names of Allah and the Prophet ; and all night long around the palace hung a surging crowd, rent by the passage in and out of Caïds and notables, in hunger for a sight of the just king. The dawn came up upon a city all illuminated. The sun had shone an hour before the lamps were out.



## XLVIII

ON that first day Jeyyâsh had so much business of a public nature to transact that it was only after sunset he was able to retire to his own chamber where the great historian had been waiting for him by appointment since the third hour after noon. After greeting his old friend affectionately, he called a captain of the guard who stood without, and said :

“Thou hast the man of whom I spoke to thee? And the two others?”

“Your Magnificence has been obeyed to the minutest detail.”

“Then bring him hither.”

After a few minutes, spent by the king and Abdul Halîm in whispered conversation, the Sheykh Salâmah was brought in. His hands were bound.

“Release him,” said the king, “for we are not afraid.”

“I thank thee, O Jeyyâsh,” murmured Salâmah bitterly. “Once before thou didst insult me without reason, and now I find myself arraigned before thee for no crime. Deign to inform me of the meaning of these things.”

“It is for that I had thee summoned,” said Jeyyâsh. “It is said thou hast the secret of a deadly poison whose presence in a dish or potion none detect. Is that the case?”

“I say not ‘Yes’ or ‘No’ to such a question. I have lived respected ; all my life is known.”

“ Do all men know thou didst betray the king, my brother, who put trust in thee ? Do all men know how thou delightest to make mischief, and urge men on to deeds of blood and misery ? ”

Salâmah did not flinch. He said with quiet dignity : “ Thou hatest me, and now thou hast the power thou wouldst destroy me. What, pray, should I, or any man, reply to accusations which are made maliciously with no more ground than the desire to work my ruin ? All defence is useless. I resign to thee my slaves and property. It is from Allah. Thou hast conquered. Let me go.”

“ Nay, I will kill thee.”

“ I will stand my trial, and well I know that thou canst find no witnesses of standing to make good these charges, while I can find a hundred to assert my fair renown.”

“ Hast ever heard of an old woman called Umm Hîlah ? ” put in Abdul Halîm, his voice tremulous with indignation. “ She and Mannullah are at hand to testify.”

The Sheykh Salâmah smiled. “ Ah, now I see the true significance of these proceedings. No need to call those liars, for I know their testimony. Umm Hîlah and her brother, the old rogue Mannullah, can testify with truth to one thing only ; which is, that a girl from my harîm, by name Yasminah, allowed by me to visit that old woman, was shamefully exposed by her before the Prince Jeyyâsh, with sad results for him and for the world, her object being mere extortion. Since thy lust, O king, led thee to misdemeanours and disasters which have made much noise, and since thou art the prince while I am but a private person, she naturally, being anxious to throw off the blame on some one, chooses me. If thou and thy confederate here present cared for truth, you would admit that the chief blame in all that chapter of events is thine

alone. As for me, I am prepared to stand my trial."

"I know thee for a cunning lawyer," said the king, "and there is just enough of truth in thy contention to disconcert a mind that was not quite made up. But mine is fixed. I kill thee. There will be no trial; and, if to kill thee be indeed a crime and thou art innocent, I only bear the burden of responsibility. It is between thee and me, and each shall plead his cause upon the Day of Reckoning, before a Judge who reads the secrets of man's heart. Thou thinkest that I do this out of private vengeance. That is not the case. It was to tell thee this I had thee summoned hither, not for trial; that thou mightst clearly understand the case between us ere thy soul goes forth."

Salâmah's face went livid, but preserved its sneering calm. "So be it. I await thee at the Judgment," he murmured, as the soldiers led him forth; for he remained convinced of his own righteousness. As he took the last step downward to the garden court—it was then night—he was pushed forward and a bowstring cut his throat. "The Lord have mercy on him," said Jeyyâsh when it was done.

The rumour of this execution made a noise, for many people had esteemed Salâmah a religious man. Many there were who blamed Jeyyâsh for it in secret, but no one dared to do so openly, except Huseyn ibn Al-Kumm who, to his father's horror, accused the king in public of an act of common jealousy; whereafter he retired from court and spent his time composing any number of satiric rhymes against the monarch of the age. In one of these he wrote:

"Our century possessed two eyes of bright renown.  
The one, through envious spite, destroyed the other,  
Unknowing that thereby he was deformed,  
And could not see so well without his brother."

The poet's relatives adjured him to be silent, fearing

lest Jeyyâsh should kill him likewise ; but he continued to compose and to recite his verses unmolested, without incurring any symptom of the king's displeasure ; till, touched at length by his opponent's magnanimity, he lost his dudgeon and returned to court.

Another and more serious loss Jeyyâsh sustained about that time. Khalf, by whose help he had regained the kingdom, for whom he felt affection, turned against him. Immediately on their success Jeyyâsh had raised him to the highest dignities, appointing him his chief vizier ; and, in fulfilment of the promise idly made in India, had bestowed on him the title, Câsim ul-Mulk, or " Sharer of the Kingdom "—which meant that all these honours were for life. But Khalf, far from being overwhelmed by such high favours, was indignant, and charged the king with falsehood and ingratitude. Jeyyâsh was stupefied by this behaviour till it dawned on him that Khalf expected him to halve the kingdom. Then he was moved to laugh. The haughty Omeyyad went off in wrath, complaining in the ears of all and sundry that the king had cheated him. " Was it not I who put him on the throne ? " he said.

" Try to put another than Jeyyâsh upon the throne, and test thy power in king-making ! " the Sheykh Abdul Halîm cried once, hearing him speak thus. " Say, who art thou ? A stranger ; while Jeyyâsh was born among us ! Jeyyâsh, too, is the glory of this age in general learning. Yet thou, who art a simple jurist like the rest of us, art not content with all the honour he has rained upon thee : thou claimest half his substance as thy payment for a year's fidelity ; nor only that, but thou wouldst have him foist thee as a despot upon folk who know thee not, nor wish to know thee. By Allah, thou art nothing but a usurer."

And " usurer " became his nickname in a land where chance-thrown nicknames stick to men for

life. In rage and indignation Khalf withdrew, shaking the dust of Yaman off his feet, and when Jeyyâsh wrote friendly to him in his place of exile, begging him to return with full assurance of the royal favour, he received for only answer a long poem penned with the utmost bitterness of wounded pride.

For a month Jeyyâsh was in anxiety, feeling uncertain whether he could hold the kingdom. His army was too small to have repelled a serious united effort of the highland clans. But Al Mukarram was inactive. It is said that when they told him of Jeyyâsh's victory he shrugged and answered: "What concern have I in all Tehâmah since the Squinter fell?" Instead of tidings of the foe's advance came daily news of fresh accessions to Jeyyâsh's territory. Still he was anxious, for his army was inadequate, and the eager crowds which cried: "God give thee victory!" on each occasion of his going forth, increased his care. One day a watchman from the wall arrived in haste to tell of clouds of dust upon the seaward plain announcing the approach of some great multitude. At once the gates were ordered to be closed, the towers were manned, and criers in the streets proclaimed the public danger. But alarm was turned to rapture when it was discovered that the multitude approaching was no hostile army, but those soldier-slaves who, on the news of Saïd's death, had fled to Dahlak. They now returned, bringing along with them the ladies and the children of the royal house. The Caïd Abdullah was their leader, and among the women, in close litters, was the Lady Alia, who fell upon her nephew's neck with tears of joy. Jeyyâsh once more embraced his children, and was gladdened by the sight of Malak, the companion of his youth. Saïd's little daughter was presented to him, and he bestowed on her a residence and great estates.

The festivities which welcomed this event were at

their height when a watcher came again to say that clouds of dust obscured the plain to southward. A troop of riders was sent out to learn the cause. They returned with tidings that an army from the Sultan of the Bani Sôr, led by his Honour's body-servant, now approached the city, bringing the beauty of the tribe, whom he (Jeyyâsh) had asked in marriage. The cup of the king's happiness then overflowed upon his subjects, who had their part in the rejoicings which went on for weeks.

Although Jeyyâsh had lost his frantic passion for Yasminah, he knew the height of human pleasure in possession of her beauty, and he felt that their reunion crowned his earthly life. She told him of the pains she had endured upon the news of his defeat and exile, and how her grandfather, alarmed at her condition, had been prepared to give her to him, though a beggar, had even sent ambassadors to Hind to seek for him before his slave arrived with tidings which had healed her spirit in a trice.

"The Lord reward thee joy through me for all thy sorrows," said Jeyyâsh.

So great was his felicity, so perfect the success of all his schemes, that the king acknowledged that he was in danger of elation, and felt the need of self-abasement before God. Accordingly, when he had set the realm in order and established the administration and defensive works, he turned his back on all that structure of magnificence, and set out with a few companions on the pilgrimage.

## XLIX

THE road to Mecca, marked by tramp of pilgrims, was in places a mile wide. Across the plain it ran like a broad ribbon of a different hue from the adjoining lands; among the mountains it was parted into threads of bridle-paths meandering among the rocks in one direction. At intervals along it there were mosques and wells founded by pious men of old for the repose of wayfarers.

The cavalcade of King Jeyyâsh proceeding from Zabîd joined the great road from South Arabia at Al Mahjam of historic memory, and there awaited the arrival of the pilgrimage.

Five days they waited. Then much dust uprising from a crevice of the land to southward told of the approach of a great multitude. The cloud drew nearer, rolling up on to the plateau, and in its front there could be seen the glint of spears and armour. The Amîr al-Hajj came first with four score lancers, the leader and protector of the crowd behind; which consisted of a motley host of riders upon camels, horses, mules, and donkeys, with jogging palanquins and towering howdahs, besides a countless multitude on foot. The plateau was soon over-run and occupied, but it was night ere all the stragglers had come in. Jeyyâsh sat at his tent-mouth, gazing on the curious scene, fantastic shadows moving round the cooking-fires, whose ruddy glow threw up the blue of night, when the

Amîr al-Hajj—a petty chieftain from the district of Ta'izz, but a descendant of the Prophet—stood before him. The leader of the pilgrims wrung his hands, appearing much distressed.

“Who am I to offer a suggestion to so great a king?” he moaned distractedly, “and yet I am in charge of all this multitude. It is my duty to enforce the law of brotherhood and keep the peace. If bloody war should come among them sacrilegiously, the shame and the disgrace would fall on me. Now I put it to thee, O thou pattern of benignity: is it safe to place two lions side by side unchained? Among the pilgrims are the King Mukarram Ahmad from Dhu Jiblah and the Lady Sayyidah, with knights and armed attendants. If thou and thy illustrious companions join us, what—I ask thee in the name of mercy—is to happen? Depart from us, I beg thee of thy charity, until we reach the place where arms are laid aside.”

Jeyyâsh reflected. “So be it,” he said at length. “Alas, the misery of men! who even upon such a journey can be still in bondage to their evil passions. How long stay you here?”

“Three days,” was the reply; “to rest the cattle and the poorer folk who go on foot.”

“Our cattle are already rested. We will start to-morrow.”

Jeyyâsh remained in thought till late that night. It seemed to him a fearful and unholy thing, one likely to bring punishment upon the earth, that, after men had known the light five hundred years, they should be still so governed by the lust of vengeance that they could obey its dictates even on the pilgrimage. Two hours before the dawn he called for candles and for parchment, and taking pen and inkhorn from his girdle, wrote:



“To the illustrious and mighty monarch Al Mukarram Ahmad, son of Ali the Suleyhi, prince of Sanaa and Dhu Jiblah, high chief of the Arabs, from Jeyyâsh, the Abyssinian, the poor slave of Allah, peace !

“I thought to go to Mecca—Allah guard it—with the pilgrimage, but the leader of the host came privately to me by night and said : ‘Depart from us, because the King Mukarram Ahmad is among us with armed servants who will fight with thine.’ I deferred to his petition as in duty bound. I and my people travel separately to the sacred frontier. But after prayer to God and long reflection, I think it proper to write this to thee :—The feud between our houses is not of my seeking. Thy father slew my father by a cunning trick and dispossessed us of our kingdom. I slew thy father and my brother slew thy uncle and three hundred of your clan. Thou, in thy turn, hast slain my brother and many thousands of our people. It is now my turn, as say the common folk. I slew no man of yours when power returned to me by God’s decree. And I swear to thee by the life of the Prophet and all faithful people that I cherish no designs against thy life or kingdom nor yet against the life or property of any man, having regained the territory which belongs to me. I acknowledge thy authority in all the highlands ; do thou acknowledge my dominion in Tehâmah. Bethink thee we are, both alike, the slaves of God, and unto Him we shall return. Bethink thee we are both of us upon the road to death. Remember how the Messenger of God proclaimed : ‘Vengeance for blood is forbidden, and the feud of blood, which was customary in the time of Ignorance, is henceforth abolished.’ What figure shall we cut at the Last Judgment if, remembering those words, we still pursue hostility ? It is my turn to strike, and I renounce such wickedness. Thy lands, thy life, thy honour are

secure from me, and may salvation and God's blessings be upon thee."

This letter he read over and dispatched before the dawn to the Amîr al-Hajj with a request that he would hand it honourably to the King Mukarram.

It was three weeks later, at the place where the great road descends to Meccan territory in a sweeping curve with oratories built at intervals around its edge, that he received his answer. He and his company had camped upon the summit of the pass, near the great mosque, until the vanguard of the pilgrimage came up with them. Jeyyâsh received a letter from the hands of the Amîr al-Hajj :

"From the king of kings and high chief of the Arabs, the champion in Al Yaman of the Fatemite supremacy, the noble Al Mukarram Ahmad son of Ali, to Jeyyâsh, the sovereign of Zabîd and all Tehâmah, greeting.

"The answer to thy letter: As the Lord liveth, I have nought to do with thee, thy people, or thy territories from henceforward. If any member of my train insults or wounds a man of thine, inform me, and the culprit will be flayed alive immediately. I will not meet thee nor converse with thee if I can help it, for I am ashamed; and if by chance we meet in Mecca face to face, forbear to greet me. The Lord have mercy on all those of both our houses who have perished in this feud of madness; and so peace."

The Leader of the Pilgrims told him that Mukarram and the Lady Sayyidah were lingering a half-day's journey in the rear, in order to avoid encounter with the riders of Zabîd. "But one of their most favoured men," he said, "is here behind me with an errand. Will it please your Highness to receive him instantly, or shall he wait?"

Jeyyâsh commanded him to be admitted, when a fat

old man rushed forward and embraced the monarch's feet.

"Welcome, O Abu Dad!" exclaimed the king with pleasure. "Where hast thou been all this long while since last we met?"

"In Hell, O glory of the age; which is to say, in Al Mukarram's favour. At last I am released; he sends me to thee as a gift. Retain me not at court, O lord of kindness. Allow me to resume a quiet life."

"Dwell where thou wilt within my kingdom in the manner pleasing to thee," laughed the king.

"It is not altogether for my own account that I approach thee. I bear a letter from the Lady Sâlihah, the mother of Muarik as they used to call her—a saint upon the likeness of our Lady Fâtimah of blessed memory. She is now the wife of a rich chief of the Karandi, bestowed upon him as a coin is passed from hand to hand. She is present here among the pilgrims, and she begs for speech of thee. Her husband, who respects her greatly, gives consent."

"I go at once. Do thou conduct me," said Jeyyâsh.

They strolled together through the camp where folks were busy packing up their arms and finery preparatory to assuming the rough garb of pilgrimage. Barbers were busy shaving pious heads each in a circle of expectant customers. Savoury smells of cooking floated on the air, together with the ceaseless chanting of the devotees, the groan of camels, bray of asses, and the shouts of people seeking friends amid the crowd. A lady in a palanquin set down upon the ground kept screaming: "Ya Muhammad! Ya Huseyn!" after some child or servant who had strayed, forgetful of the fact that every mother's son in that assembly was named Muhammad or Huseyn.

At length they reached a group of tents of guarded

privacy, and gave their names to an attendant. The husband of the Lady Sâlihah came out to them, kissing Jeyyâsh's hand with the profoundest reverence. Abu Dad remained without among the servants while the king was led into the lady's tent, where he remained an hour, informing Sâlihah of the condition of her little daughter, and giving her the latest tidings from Zabîd. He offered to restore the child to her safe keeping, and her husband seemed to wish her to assume the guardianship ; but she refused, declaring that she was resigned to part with her, and would not willingly resume a charge which would revive old memories. She assured Jeyyâsh that she was happy in the duties of her present life, and only wished to remain undisturbed in it. That was her reason for opposing his suggestion that her lord should bring her to Zabîd on his return from Mecca. "Zabîd, as we hear now, is paradise," she smiled ; "I would not visit paradise and then depart. The Lord reward thee, O my brother, for the good which thou hast done. The very air in all the country has become more fragrant since thy bloodless victory."

"By Allah," said her husband warmly. "All the highlands praise thee ; and if Mukarram wished to war against thee he could raise no army. He is shamed. The frost of the Suleyhi melts before the sun of mercy."

As Jeyyâsh walked back through the confusion of the pilgrim camp, he noticed shaven crowns on all hands where there had been turbans, and the single garment of the pilgrim in the place of common dress. The sight reminded him of duties which he had forgotten for a moment. He also hastened to assume the pilgrim's guise. The chant of prayers resounded all that night. Before the dawn a song of wondrous sweetness came from the minaret of the great mosque

which crowned the pass. A crowd of people gathered near to listen. When at length it ceased men were surprised to see a man both fat and old descend from the high gallery, for from the notes they had supposed the singer to be young.

"God's mercy is for ever young," said Abu Dad to those who sought an explanation, "and it is now upon me in full measure, since I have my freedom."

And those who heard him proffered their congratulations, supposing him some new emancipated slave. But the freedom which he spoke of was no more than this: that he would never be obliged to make a joke again. Not being dedicated to the pilgrimage, he set out before the sun rose on his journey, deeming it wisdom, since he had to move his wife and his belongings to Tehâmah, to do so while Mukarram Ahmad was away.

By then Jeyyâsh, among the foremost crowd of pilgrims, was halfway down the pass that led to Mecca—bare-headed, and bare-legged, wrapped in the pilgrim's blanket of coarse hair. Divested of all earthly majesty, all earthly care, bound to the same obedience as the meanest slave, he walked in prayer and pious meditation. The breeze of the Hejjâz was cool upon his face and limbs. At moments when it languished, gusts of warmer air rose from the earth and rocks, foretelling the hot day. In a little grove of ragged trees beside the road, some newly wakened dove was moaning like a childless mother. Lines from the ancient Arab poets thronged his memory like voices half awake before the dawn—the dawn of El Islâm, of truth and light. The day was breaking. Far away across a land whose dust was hallowed by the persecuted footsteps of God's messenger, he saw the cruel, the beloved city in a glow. It was the blessing, and had been the curse, of El Islâm—this city which contained

no relic save its ancient memories of cruel persecution and idolatry ; no beauty to seduce man's thoughts from God. And, as he pondered on the glory of the Unity, and how the folk of old obscured its light with vain imaginings, he praised the wisdom which had made men pilgrims to an empty house.

THE END